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## MYSTERY BIG CATS

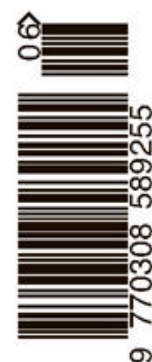
FLESH-AND-BLOOD BEASTS  
OR OTHERWORDLY ENTITIES?

## DATING A DORSET GIANT

PINPOINTING THE AGE OF OUR  
NAUGHTIEST HILL FIGURE

## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE DRONE KIND

WHAT'S BEHIND THE RECENT SPATE  
OF NEAR-MISSES WITH UFOs?





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## Something STRANGE

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Cows

Silver  
Giants

UFOs



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COVER ILLUSTRATION: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PANTHER: IBRAHIM SUHA DERBENT/GETTY IMAGES

GALAXY: GUILLERMO FERLA OZE FIRE: RICARDO GOMEZ ANGEL. BOTH AT UNSPLASH

ALL HEADER ICONS THROUGHOUT THE MAGAZINE BY CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



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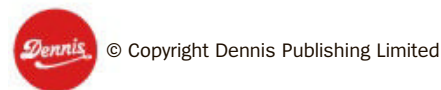
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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## ABCs, UFOs & UAVs...

This is probably the first issue of the year where the weather beyond the windows of Fortean Towers has been warm enough to tempt us outside. With that in mind, we bring you a trio of features with an outdoor feel: Merrily Harpur returns to the pages of *FT* with an update on her quest for Britain's Anomalous Big Cats (p32); David Clarke looks skyward, asking if a spate of recent near-miss reports means we should be worrying about hostile drones rather than old-fashioned UFOs (p38); and Jan Bondeson digs down to the roots of some arboreal folklore to trace the legend of the once majestic Maud's Elm (p44). Elsewhere, SD Tucker concludes his trilogy of tales about South American generals (p50), and we celebrate the lesser known fortetan side of the late Prince Philip (pp14, 18-21). All this plus Uri Geller versus the curse of the pharaohs, the mystery of the Man from Taured, a major shake-up in physics and bizarre accounts of cat- and rabbit-people...

### ALL CHANGE

We are sorry to announce the departure of news editor Chris Josiffe after 18 busy months in the role. While Chris has done a fantastic job of rounding up the world's weirdest news, the sheer volume of stories sent in by FT's army of clipsters has proved incompatible with finishing his book – a biography of psychical researcher Eric Dingwall – so he is stepping down in order to focus his energies on that task.

Stepping into the breach, we're happy to say, is Ian Simmons, whose name will be familiar to longtime readers. Ian's association with FT goes back a quarter of a century, during which time he has written features, edited books, mounted exhibitions, chaired talks at UnConvention and been a constant presence at Fort Sorts. To help keep things running smoothly, Abigail Mason will be taking charge of the regular avalanche of news clippings. All of this means, of course, that we now have a new PO Box address and a new email to which all clippings should be sent – see the info box opposite for full details.

### GETTING COPIES OF FT

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your regular *FT* fix, and a great way to support us if you can – turn to p.60 for the latest offers.

### ERRATA

**FT403:57:** Chris Hill, in his review of *The Craft* by John Dickie, described masonry as “Scotland's greatest export... its Hibernian roots obscured.” David Stokes wrote in to point out that Hibernia was the Latin name for Ireland, not Scotland. Anne Keane, of Edinburgh, commented that: “If it's Scotland's greatest export it's got Caledonian roots. Unless we're talking Hibernian FC.”

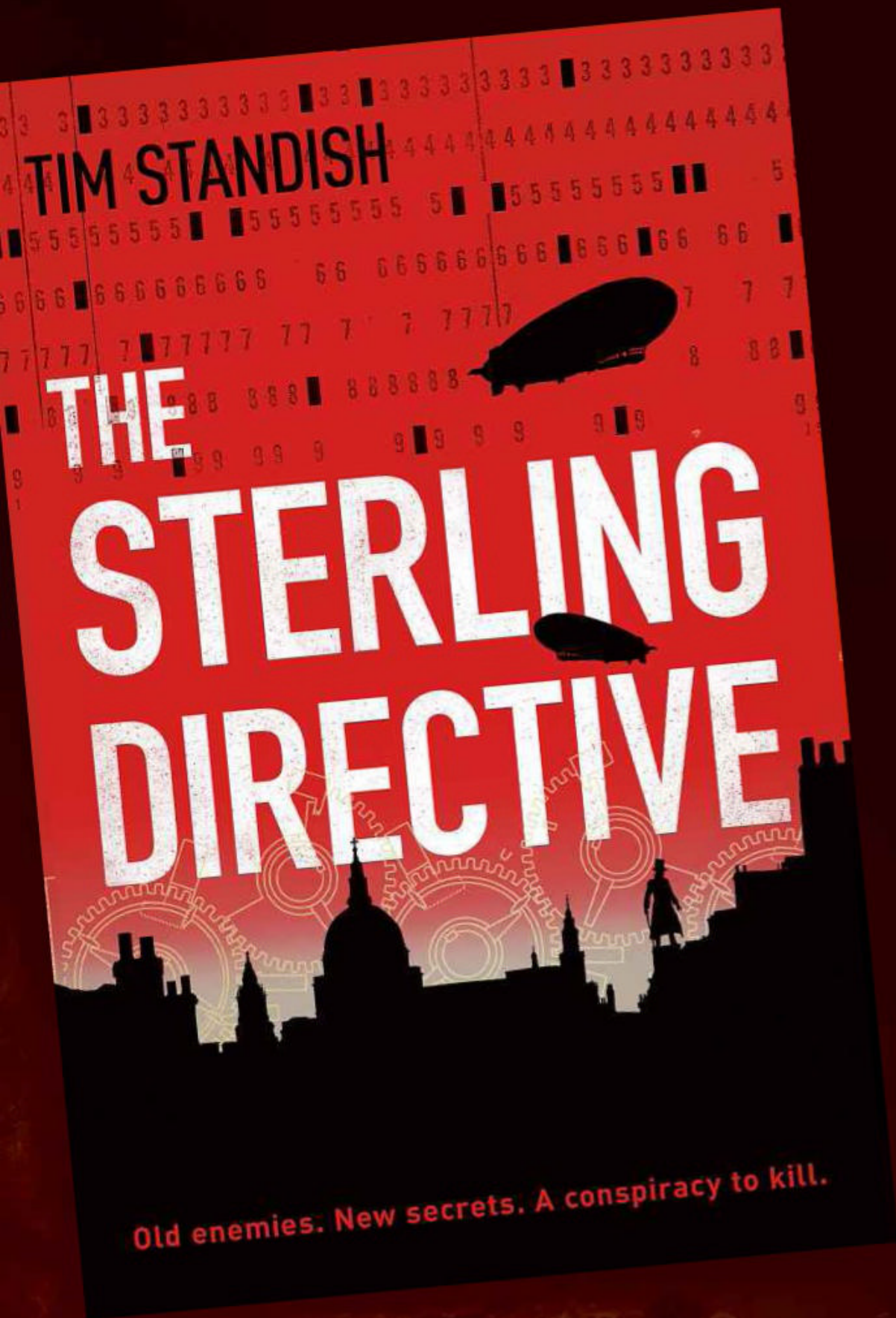
**FT405:75:** A last-minute design error meant that the name of the writer of “Summoning UFOs” in the ‘It Happened to Me’ letters section was missed off. It should have read: Bruce E White, Tucker, Georgia. Our apologies to Bruce for inadvertently non-personing him.

## NEW ADDRESS FOR FT NEWS CLIPPINGS

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## DATING A DORSET GIANT

New studies reveal the age of Britain's naughtiest hill figure

The giant figure of a naked man on the hillside at Cerne Abbas in Dorset has puzzled and amused people for centuries – but no one has ever been sure exactly how many centuries. There has been no shortage of theories: is he an Iron Age fertility symbol? A Roman figure of Hercules? A Saxon god? Or even a satirical cartoon of Oliver Cromwell? In early 2020 archaeologists from the National Trust decided to settle the question, to mark 100 years of the Trust owning the site. At least that was the plan.

“The results of the research have been very surprising,” says senior archaeologist Martin Papworth. “What we imagined and what we found were two different things.”

The giant was created by cutting an outline into the steeply-sloping hillside and ramming crushed chalk into the trench to make a smooth white surface. Every few years when the chalk becomes discoloured, eroded or overgrown, it has to be renewed (see FT385:4, 6-7). The archaeologists planned to dig into the deepest parts of the figure and use optically stimulated luminescence dating to discover when the ground had last been exposed to daylight.

“We dug these little narrow trenches in his elbows and in his feet, where we knew the silts had washed down the hill and built up on the horizontal parts of the chalk,” Martin explains. “We found surprisingly deep archaeology which showed people have been re-chalking him over



### *Why would the monks tolerate a naked man on their doorstep?*

and over again over a long, long period of time. We imagined that on such a steep hillside it couldn't have been very deep but it was almost a metre of all these different chalks on top of chalk, and it was at the very base of these that we took our samples.”

The dig took place in March 2020, and as the coronavirus pandemic took hold in Britain, it became increasingly clear that the team were working against the clock. “If we'd gone a week later it wouldn't have happened – we'd have been in lockdown. We grabbed a moment in time,” says Martin. The dig ended at twilight

on the Friday before the first lockdown, but enough samples had been gathered for the lab work to go ahead. Now the results are in.

“The Cerne Abbas giant isn't prehistoric and he's not Roman either. In fact, he can't be earlier than AD 700, so he's Saxon or later,” reveals Martin.

The dates found in the samples range between the early 8th to the 15th century, with samples from the lowest layers giving a date range of 700 to 1100. This might give support to the theory that the giant represents a Saxon god named Helith or Helis. By 700 Dorset was officially Christian, but Wessex King

Ine's law code of 694 includes penalties for failing to baptise children or tithe income to the Church, which could suggest wholehearted uptake of the new ways might have been slower in some places. In the 11th century, the Benedictine writer Goscelin records a tale of St Augustine trying to convert the heathens of Cerne and being assaulted with fish tails for his trouble (although they later repented and were baptised). The story is wholly unhistoric, but might it contain a grain of folk memory that this area took longer to adopt the new religion than others?

The new dates certainly present historians with a conundrum. Why is there no mention of the giant in early records or surveys describing the village and the hill? And why would the monks of Cerne Abbey tolerate the scandalous figure of a naked man on their doorstep?

“That's the trouble with archaeology,” admits Martin. “It doesn't always do the thing you expect it to do. It seems that though we can give an earliest date, we can't be sure about a latest date. It's definitely earlier than 1694<sup>1</sup> and our date range does seem to indicate that he's mediæval. The science tells you something; I suppose we take that away and think a bit more.”

The survey team also collected samples of snail shells trapped in the silt layers and recorded carefully measured section-plans of the different layers of chalk and silt. By examining the different snail species, they can tell whether the surrounding land was mostly covered with grass or scrub. The thickness of the different layers also gives some idea of how much time passed between each re-chalking of the giant. Based on these results, Martin has tentatively come up with a new theory.

“I wonder whether he was created very early on, perhaps in the late Saxon period, and that he became grassed over and was forgotten. Then at some stage, in low sunlight, people saw that figure on the hill and they decided to recut him. It's another theory to put in the pot, but it works with my archaeological section drawings and it reassures me about the Abbey being there and not mentioning it in any of its records. I guess someone like me always wants to know the answers and I think a lot of other people do too; but the good thing is, I think he still does have an air of mystery. We haven't sorted it out completely, so I think everyone's happy.”

Lisa Gledhill

<sup>1</sup> The first written reference to the giant occurs in the accounts of the churchwarden of St Mary's, Cerne Abbas, for 1694. He records spending three shillings for repairs to the giant.

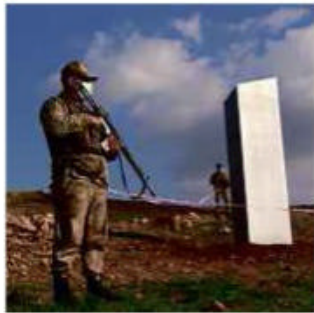




## THE HAUNTED LIBRARY

Does digital reading lead to fewer ghosts?

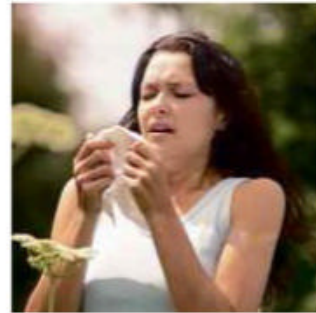
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## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

More monolith madness, plus very dull men

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## MEDICAL MYSTERIES

Why does bright light cause photosneezia?

PAGE 28

# SUEZ INCIDENT: URI TO THE RESCUE

Veteran cutlery-botherer steps in to dislodge giant container ship from canal



ABOVE LEFT: The *MV Ever Given*, stuck in the Suez Canal. ABOVE RIGHT: But not to worry – Uri Geller quickly volunteered his help.

A huge container ship blocked the Suez Canal for one week, initially causing a 100-boat tailback, but eventually leaving 300 ships stuck on either side. The Taiwan-owned, Panama-registered *MV Ever Given* had lost power around four miles (6.5km) into the 120-mile (193km) canal as it was heading north, bound for Rotterdam as part of a 20-ship convoy. About 12 per cent of global trade passes through the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and provides the shortest sea link between Asia and Europe. An alternative route, around the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of Africa, can take two weeks longer. Some shipping companies had to re-route vessels around East Africa, raising fears over pirate attacks. The *Ever Given* blockage was holding up an estimated \$9.6bn (£7bn) of goods each day, equivalent to \$400m (£290m) an hour. The Suez Canal Authority's (SCA) chairman, General Osama Rabie, estimated that Egypt had lost up to \$14m (£10m) revenue for each day the canal was closed.

Some social media commentators pointed to the Egyptian government's plan to relocate 22 mummies (including those of King Ramses II and Queen Ahmose-Nefertari) from

the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Fustat on 3 April (see p11). This, they suggested, had somehow caused a series of disasters in Egypt. As well as the canal blockage, a fatal train accident, the collapse of a 10-storey building and several fires across the country were blamed on the Pharaohs' wrath.

The *Ever Given* had drifted across the entire width of the canal before becoming jammed on 23 March. The vessel is one of the world's largest at 1,312ft (400m) long and 175ft (53m) wide, and weighs almost 200,000 tons. Initial attempts to shift the ship by means of 14 tugboats trying to nudge it out of the way at high tide failed; meanwhile, dredgers continued to remove thousands of tons of sand and clay from the canal bank where the vessel's bow was lodged. Alternative solutions were considered, including lightening the stranded ship's load to render it easier to move. This would have involved transferring some containers to another vessel or to the canal bank, but would have required specialist equipment and could have taken weeks.

Never one to miss out on an opportunity to help at a time of crisis (see his assistance on behalf of the England football team in 1996, when he caused Scotland to miss a crucial penalty; **FT159:7**), Uri Geller urged *Daily Star* readers to focus their minds at 11.11am and 11.11pm on 27 March. The combined efforts of the tabloid newspaper's readers could, Geller claimed, cause the ship to bend, much like one of the many pieces of cutlery he had disfigured in his 1970s heyday. "We can do this with mind power energy," said the veteran spoon-bender. "It is possible to move the ship. Let's go for this... I believe in your powers."

Strangely, the huge vessel was dislodged two days later on 29 March. Rescue workers from the SCA, working with a team from Dutch firm Smit Salvage, partially refloated the *Ever Given*, straightening it out in the canal. After several hours it shifted briefly back across the canal, but was manoeuvred free by tugboats as the tide changed. *D.Mail*, 24 Mar; *D.Star*, 26 Mar; *BBC News*, 28 Mar; *D.Mail*, 29 Mar; *Guardian*, 30 Mar 2021.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**SCIENTISTS HAVE TAUGHT SPINACH TO SEND EMAILS AND IT COULD WARN US ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE**

euronews.com, 1 Feb 2021.

**Seaweed will stop cow farts killing us**

Sun, 18 Mar 2021.

**REDUNDANT WASPS FIND WORK WITH RELATIVES**

<i> 16 Feb 2021.

**Is 14-legged killer squid found two miles beneath Antarctica being weaponised by Putin?**

Express.co.uk, 30 Nov 2016.

**GIANTS THRASHED IN TOUGH ROAD TRIP**

Sydney Morning Herald, 2 Mar 2020.



## SIDELINES...

### TACO SURPRISE

After a motorbike accident, an unnamed 38-year-old Idaho man had to have his foot amputated. He was allowed to take it home with him, and later invited 11 friends to share a once-in-a-lifetime culinary adventure. Ten said yes, and a chef friend prepared a chunk of meat from the top of the shin, marinating it overnight and sautéing it with peppers, onions, and lime. It was served with corn tortillas and a tomatillo sauce. *iflscience.com*, 25 Mar 2021.

### WOOLLY WONDERS

A sheep beat odds of a million to one when it gave birth to five lambs, with each weighing around 7.5lb (3.4kg), at Hartpury College, Gloucestershire. *Sun*, 8 April 2021.

### SHRINKING HEARTS

Space travellers will need to follow a high-intensity exercise routine to stop weightlessness shrinking their hearts. Without gravity, the organ doesn't need to work so hard, said University of Texas researchers, *Metro*, 30 Mar 2021.

### ALLERGIC TO HERSELF

Niah Selway, 23, from Hastings, East Sussex, suffers from aquagenic pruritus, making her allergic to water. Everything from rain to her own sweat, urine and tears burn her skin. Not surprisingly, she is mostly housebound. *Sun*, 30 Mar 2021.

### SOLAR PARAMOIA

Officials in Woodland, North Carolina, have rejected plans for a solar farm amid worries from residents it would "suck up all the energy from the Sun". Three such farms had already been approved in the area, but locals weren't impressed, fearing that businesses would not come to the area. *D.Mirror*, 29 Aug 2020.



## COVID CORNER

Bomb plots, striking sex workers and a dead Norwegian conspiracy theorist

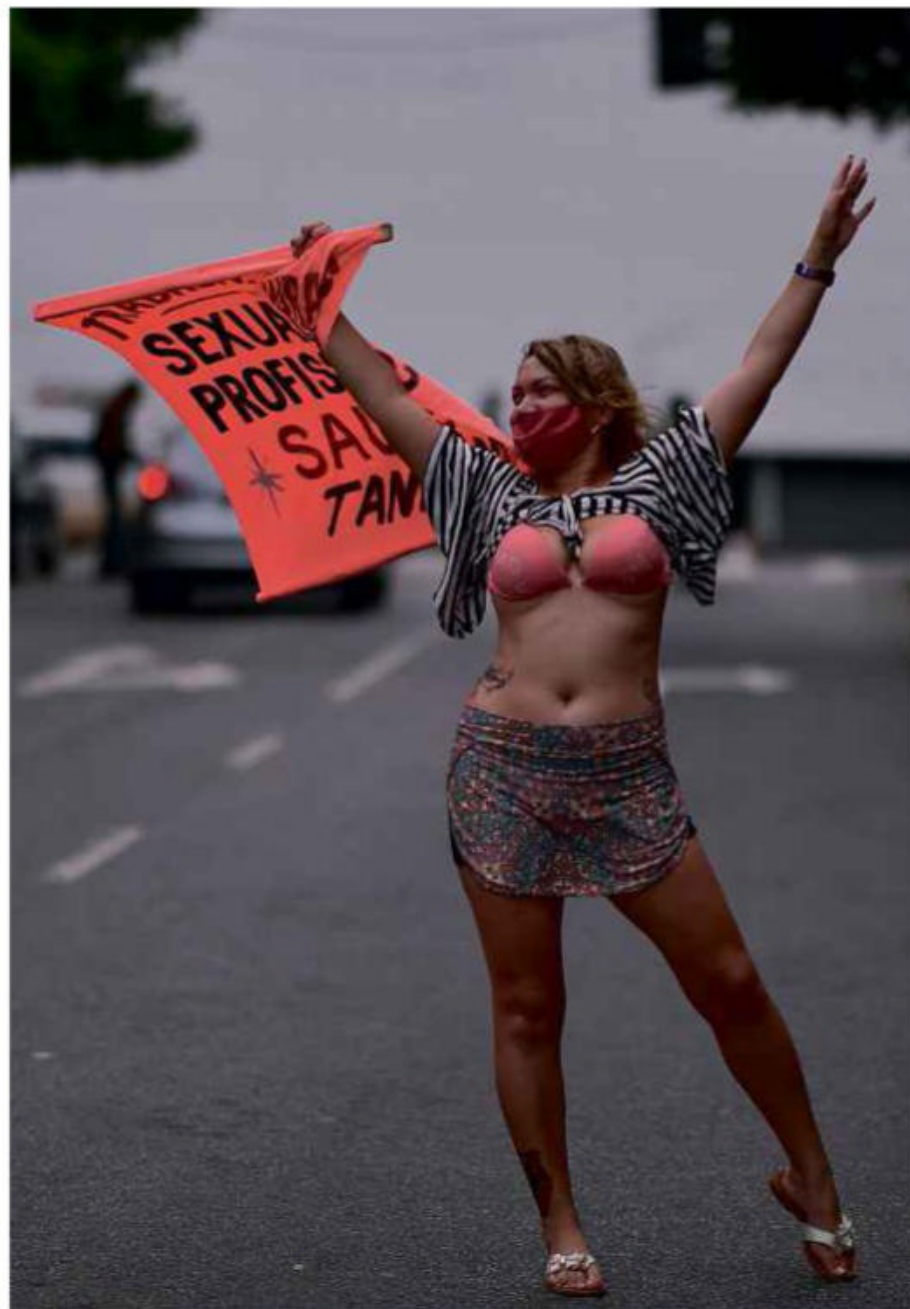
### ANTI-VAX BOMBER

Netherlands police arrested a 37-year-old man on suspicion of plotting to bomb a Covid vaccination centre. The man was arrested on 18 March after police learned that he planned to attack a former town hall now repurposed as a vaccination centre in the northern port of Den Helder, 90km (55 miles) north of Amsterdam. Police are now investigating whether the suspect had any accomplices. In early March, a blast caused by what police described as a "homemade device" smashed windows at a Covid testing centre in a small Dutch town. And in January, rioters torched another testing facility in the fishing village of Urk on the first night of the nationwide curfew imposed as part of the government's latest coronavirus lockdown. Prosecutors are treating the alleged plot as a terrorist act because it "aimed to instil serious fear among the population and to disrupt the economic and social structures of the country". Their statement added: "This also affects public health: The fewer people can be vaccinated, the more victims the virus will claim." The Netherlands is currently in a months-long lockdown while infection figures are still high. Restaurants, bars, museums and other public places remain closed, although the government is considering a relaxation of some restrictions for people who can prove they have been vaccinated or have tested negative. *apnews.com*, 8 Apr 2021.

### BRAZILIAN VAX: PROSTITUTES DOWN TOOLS

Sex workers in Belo Horizonte in southeastern Brazil have gone on strike for a week, demanding they be included in the frontline workers category, those who will be offered the Covid vaccine as a priority.

Thousands of sex workers in the city say that closure of hotels due to the lockdown has forced them to solicit for clients on the street. "We are in the front line, moving the economy and



ABOVE: Sex workers in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, have gone on strike, demanding they be included in the frontline workers category for vaccination.

we are at risk," said Cida Vieira, president of the Association of Prostitutes of Minas Gerais state. "We need to get vaccinated." Ms Vieira and other women held a protest on a street lined with shuttered hotels where they used to work, waving placards saying: "Sex workers are professionals" and "Sex work and health". Lucimara Costa, one of the protesting women, said: "We are part of the priority group because we deal with various types of people and our lives are at risk." Ms Vieira added: "We are a priority group, we are health educators, peer educators. We form part of that group, since we give information about STIs for men, distribute condoms."

The government has prioritised health workers,

elderly citizens, those with underlying health conditions, teachers, and indigenous peoples. They hope to vaccinate this group, comprising 77 million people, during the first half of 2021, but experts fear that a shortage of doses may mean this programme may continue into September. 332,000 people have died from Covid in Brazil, a pro capita death toll second only to the USA. *[AFP]*, 7 Apr 2021.

### DENIER'S DEMISE

A prominent Norwegian Covid denier and conspiracy theorist has died after hosting two illegal events in a barn at his property in Gran, 40 miles (64km) north of Oslo. Hans Kristian Gaarder, 60, died on 6 April; the post mortem revealed he had died from

DOUGLAS MAGNO / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES





coronavirus. At least 12 guests at Gaarder's events, held on 26 and 27 March, are reported to have also contracted the virus and infected others. Gatherings had been banned in the area since 16 March, because of the rising infection rate, and police are now trying to establish and trace the other attendees.

It is thought that Gaarder may have been ill for several weeks without informing anyone. He appeared on television as well as editing an online magazine, and frequently posted messages on Facebook claiming Covid to be no worse than the common cold, posts that were marked as 'false information'. In 2009, he rose to prominence as one of three people who reported Norway's National Institute of Public Health to the police for "engaging in extreme fear propaganda and lies regarding swine flu". As well as disseminating anti-vaxxer views, Gaarder also posted theories about the Illuminati and claims that President Biden's election victory had been illegitimate. His 26 March event was advertised as "Trump, Biden and the way forward for the USA and the world". *D.Mail*, 15 Apr 2021.

## PREHISTORIC COVID

A new study indicates that an ancient coronavirus, or a closely related pathogen, triggered an epidemic among ancestors of present-day East Asians around 25,000 years ago.

DNA analysis of over 2,000 people showed genetic changes in response to this ancient epidemic accumulated over the next 20,000 years or so. The finding raises the possibility that some East Asian people today may have inherited biological

adaptations to coronaviruses. Genes with ancient viral histories might also provide clues to researchers searching for better antiviral drugs.

The study used a publicly available DNA database of 2,504 individuals from 26 ethnic populations on five continents, which included Chinese Dai, Vietnamese Kinh and African Yoruba people, initially focusing on 420 proteins known to interact with coronaviruses, including 332 that interact with SARS-CoV-2. Substantially increased production of all 420 proteins, a sign of past exposures to coronavirus-like epidemics, was found only in East Asians. The findings are consistent with an initially vigorous genetic response to a virus that waned over time. This may either have been because East Asians adapted to the virus, or the virus lost its ability to cause disease, but if the former, may provide an explanation for reduced Covid infection and death rates reported in East Asian nations. However, other factors, such as fast and strict lockdowns and widespread mask use, may have deterred infections in some of these countries. The study's findings follow related evidence that a set of inherited Neanderthal gene variants raise the risk of developing severe Covid in some South Asian and European people, while other variants may provide some level of protection. *sciencenews.org*, 14 Apr 2021.

## VACCINATION NO-SHOW

When pensioner Christina Malley failed to turn up for her Covid vaccination, nurses visited her home in Cove, Aberdeen. The remains of Mrs Malley, who

would have been in her 80s, were later found inside the property, leading to a police investigation. Exactly how and when she died has not yet been established, but it is understood that her death occurred at least 10 and possibly 12 years ago. *D.Mirror*, 10 Mar 2021.

## ON A TIGHT LEASH

A Canadian husband and wife were each issued with \$1,500 fines by Quebec police for violating the lockdown curfew, despite the wife's protests that she was walking her dog. The couple were caught walking in the southern Quebecois city of Sherbrooke at 9pm one Saturday night in February, with the woman leading her husband who was wearing a leash. Quebec's current lockdown regulations state that people may walk their dogs after the 8pm curfew, as long as they stay within one kilometre of their house. Police said the two were walking towards the downtown area of Sherbrooke and refused to cooperate with officers. *montreal.ctvnews.ca*, 12 Jan 2021.

## BILLY GOAT BONANZA

In the first lockdown of last year, the Kashmiri goats living on the Great Orme in North Wales made headlines when they left the rocky headland they usually call home and laid claim to the streets of nearby Llandudno (FT392:7). The brazen billy goats – it appears to be the bolder males that made the journey – now appear to have spread beyond the town centre, where they may be in danger from increased traffic as Wales comes out of lockdown. Sally Pidcock, warden of the Great Orme Country Park, said: "They have become very confident because so few people have been around again during lockdown. We're asking motorists to keep an eye out for them." What's more, over the last year there has been a population explosion among the herd after the Covid crisis forced countryside wardens to abandon a planned contraceptive injection campaign. There are now thought to be some 30 male goats at large in the town and 150 less adventurous ones, plus females and kids, on the Orme. *Guardian*, 17 Mar 2021.

# SIDELINES...

## SUPERBOY

A 14-year-old boy who can deadlift two-and-a-half times his bodyweight might be the world's strongest teen. Josh Bland from Sunderland, who weighs 147lb (66.7kg), can hoist 364lb (165kg) – heavier than a baby elephant. He is the son of a former Army fitness instructor. *Sun*, 27 Feb 2021.

## BRISTOL BROCK'S RESCUE

A badger found clinging to a tyre in Bristol Harbour was rescued after passers-by raised the alarm and notified Pauline Kidner, founder of Secret World Wildlife Rescue, who said: "It was heart wrenching to see him swimming and crying at the same time". The badger had fallen into the harbour overnight and had been struggling to stay afloat for two hours before dragging itself close to mooring ropes. It will stay with Secret World Wildlife Rescue for a few days to recover from its ordeal. *BBC News*, 25 Mar 2021.

## UNDER HIS MOSE

Mike Rumsey, curator of minerals at the Natural History Museum in London, has discovered a new mineral in a sample mined in Cornwall 220 years ago. Long thought to be iroconite, which is bright blue, this rock was dark green and found to be sufficiently chemically different to be defined as a new species, now called kernowite. Around 100 new mineral species are found each year, but very rarely in the UK. *D.Telegraph*, 24 Dec 2020.

## LURKING IMMUSEUMS

Fossils dug up in the Fens in the 19th century and stored in the Sedgwick Museum in Cambridge and the Booth Museum in Brighton, were originally categorised as parts of a shark. Now PhD student Roy Smith has identified them as parts of a mystery species of pterosaur (flying lizard). *D.Telegraph*, 11 Nov 2020.

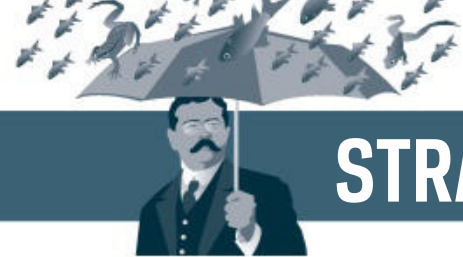
## CASTAWAYS

Two men and a woman survived on a diet of coconuts, conches and rats for 33 days after they were cast away on an uninhabited atoll between Florida and Cuba. The trio, from Cuba, told US coastguards their boat had capsized, so they swam to Anguilla Cay, whence they were rescued on 9 February. *D.Telegraph*, 12 Feb 2021.



ABOVE: Norwegian conspiracy theorist, anti-vaxxer and Covid denier Hans Kristian Gaarder has died from the coronavirus.





## SIDELINES...

### IF THE SHOE FITS

UK shoe shop chain Shoe Zone PLC has announced that Mr Terry Boot has been appointed as its finance director, replacing its former director Peter Foot. *www.business-live.co.uk*, 8 Mar 2021.

### MOT TO BE SMFFED AT

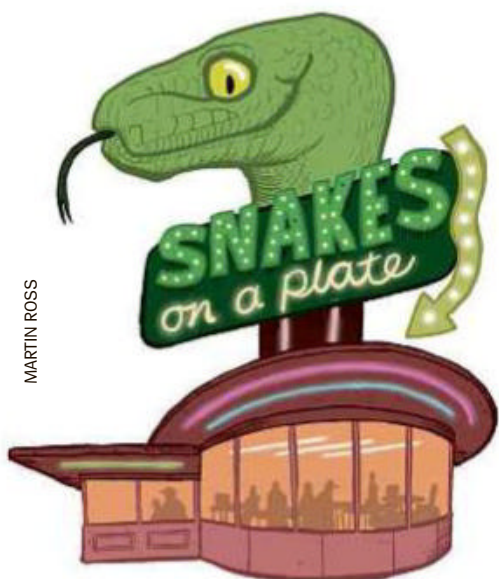
In 2018, five-year-old Sameer Anwar, of Dunedin in New Zealand, inserted a piece of Lego up his nose. He told his parents, but the family GP was unable to find or remove it. As the boy showed no signs of pain or distress, the Lego was forgotten. Then on 16 August 2020, Sameer sniffed some cupcakes and his nose began to hurt. He blew his nose and out dropped the piece of Lego, covered in fungus. *Guardian*, 18 Aug 2020.

### BUD WISER

A Boston, MA, man went to sleep listening to music through his wireless earbuds. Next day when he tried drinking a glass of water, the liquid wouldn't go down; he had to lean over so it could drain from his throat. He then noticed he was missing one of his earbuds, and an X-ray at hospital revealed the small plastic device had lodged in his lower oesophagus. He said he'd felt no more than minor discomfort, but after his experience, advised others to be careful when falling asleep wearing headphones. *[AP]* 6 Feb 2021.

### PYTHON PIE?

Florida residents may soon be encouraged to eat Burmese python meat in an effort to control the invasive predator, which often grows to 16ft (5m), and decimates the local fauna. The south-east Asian reptiles were first discovered wild in the state in the 1980s. Online outlets offer python jerky at £60 a pound. *D.Telegraph*, 22 Dec 2020.



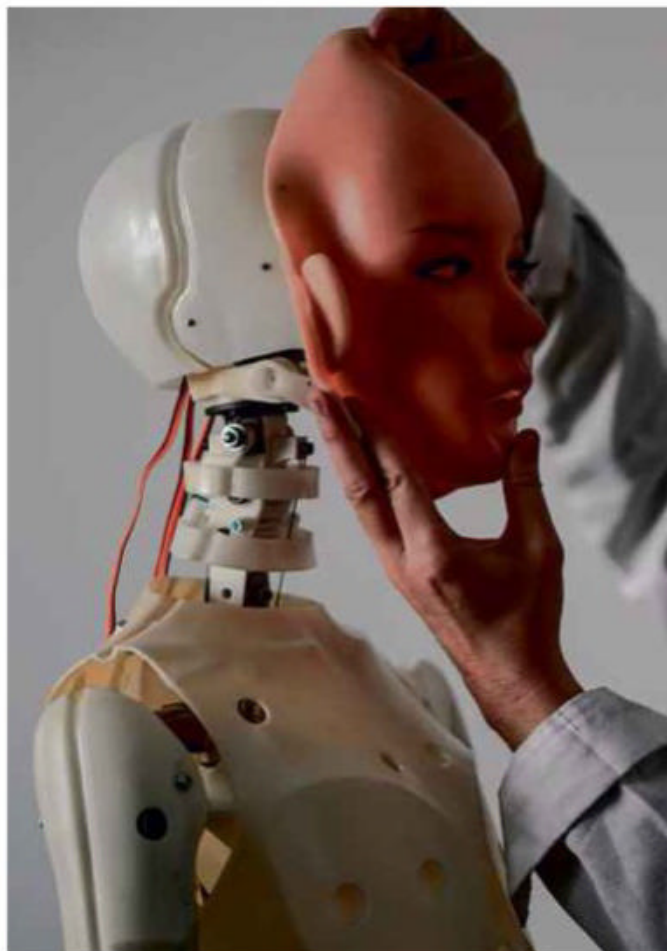
## FUTURE SHOCKS

Silicone sex partners for sale and TikTok time travellers at large

### ROBOT SEX CLONES

Robotic 'clones' of customers' dead partners could be created with 3D scans in the near future, with the ability to walk and perform other functions, according to sex robot company Lux Botics. The firm claim their artists would use 3D scans to create a mould into which would be placed a robotic 'skeleton'. The basic model would be painted and fitted with lips, nails, eyebrows and all other required features.

The robot manufacturer says it produces "ultra-realistic humanoids" and uses a flagship model called Stephanie, which comes with speech control, a facial recognition function, and artificial intelligence. But Lux Botics anticipate some clients will commission a custom-built companion based on photos of deceased loved ones. The costs are estimated at \$5,000-\$10,000 for the artists' work and one scan, with the 3D printing in the region of \$3,000-\$5,000. The mould itself would cost an additional \$5,000. "We can make robots that talk but we have not made robots that truly walk on their own," said one of Lux Botics's co-founders. "We hope to develop this in the near future. We can make a large number of body parts that can move in a realistic manner." Another company, Sex Doll Genie, produces 'Enterprise-grade' AI sex robots which come with MP3 players and can be programmed to say whatever the customer wishes. These AI dolls are equipped with a robotic head powered by Google's Android 10 operating system. A third sex robot manufacturer, Silicone Lovers, said they have experienced a marked increase in demand for 'sex robots' owing to worldwide coronavirus lockdowns. Some customers have requested dolls with human skeletons, and others have asked if they can commission animal-human hybrid robots. "Many people who



LEFT: A robot sex doll is fitted with a silicone face. BELOW: The deserted world of 2026.

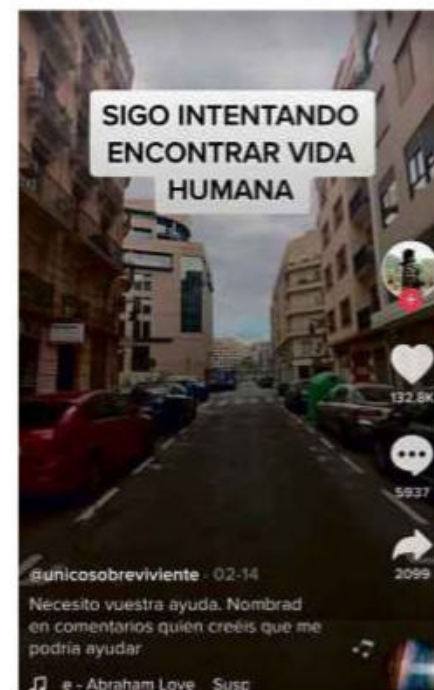
depicts a walk through an empty street in the Spanish city of Valencia. The recording then cuts to an empty clothes shop, stacked full of items but with no staff or customers in sight. However, if he has – as he claims – uploaded the video in the year 2027, then there must still be an Internet connection available. Another TikTok user, @2029man, otherwise known as The Messenger, tells his 600,000 followers that he is from the future and is thus able to make predictions – many of which are proving to be false. On 3 January 2021 he predicted that

wouldn't normally even think of dolls as an option have turned their attention toward dolls," said a Silicone Lovers spokesperson. "We've seen a huge increase in interest from couples as well. Perhaps they might be stuck at home looking at ways to keep sex interesting during lockdown or exploring safe ways to try threesomes." The spokesperson also claimed that some customers who had lost their partners due to Covid "want a doll to aid with the grieving process," adding "it's rewarding to be a part of that kind of healing process and know we're genuinely helping people." *D.Star*, 26 Mar 2021.

### TIKTOK TIME TRAVELLER

TikTok user Javier has told his 1.2million followers that he has travelled ahead in time to the year 2027, where, he says, he found a world where humanity has become extinct. His TikTok videos apparently offer support for this alarming forecast. They show buildings, cars and utilities that have remained in place unused, but with no sign of human activity, or, indeed, of people. Javier, who goes by the username @unicosobreviviente ('only survivor'), posted his first video on 13 February 2021, which

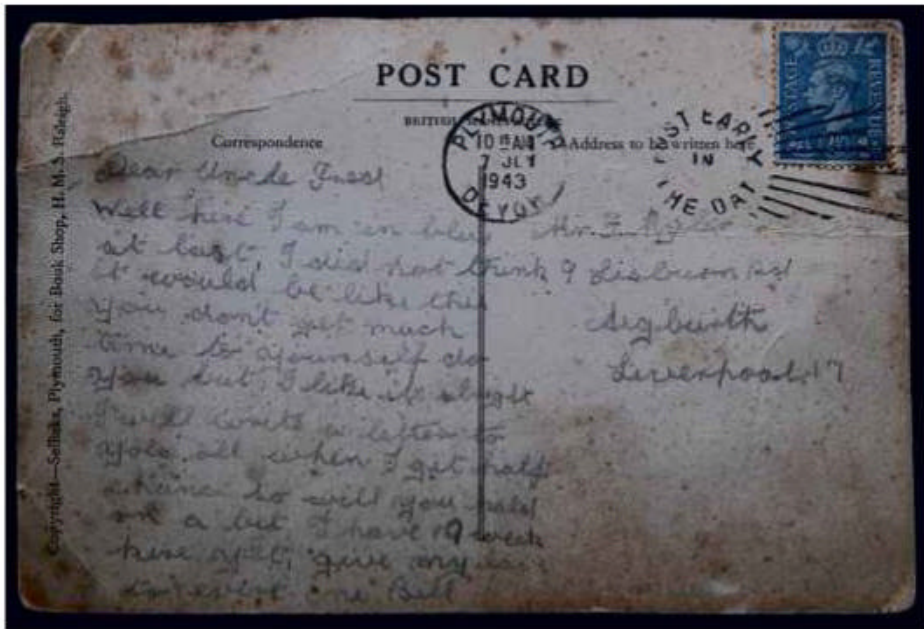
Congress would reject the electoral college decision on the 2020 presidential election. "This will lead to Nancy Pelosi becoming president on January 20," he warned. "Be ready." Clearly, this did not come to pass, and neither did he manage to predict hundreds of rioters storming the US Capitol building. (See FT240 for a time travel special, including the infamous John Titor, who appeared on various bulletin boards in 2000 and 2001 claiming to be a visitor from the year 2036). *D.Star*, 27 Mar 2021.







## SNAIL MAIL | Not even the pandemic can explain these stories of long-delayed letters and peripatetic postcards



**ABOVE:** The postcard sent in 1943 by William Myler Caldwell to his Uncle Fred in Liverpool; it arrived this year. **BELOW:** Jim Green with the postcard he sent to his parents in 1991 from Benidorm and which arrived 28 years late.

- On 22 September 2020, Zoe Fierro, 44, from Northampton received a letter from her late grandfather 22 years after he posted it. Ronald Smith from Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, who died in 1999, sent the letter by second class post in June 1998 to thank her for the card and vouchers she had given him for his birthday a few weeks earlier, in May. "Seeing his writing again was a genuine joy," she said. In May 2020, the family of a soldier who died on the retreat to Dunkirk in May 1940 received his last letter 80 years after he wrote it. *Times*, 26 Sept 2020.

- A picture postcard of St Paul's Cathedral was delivered in Norwich in October, 100 years and three months late. It was addressed to Miss Eva Browne from her cousin Florrie, postmarked Maida Vale, west London, 22 July 1920, and carried a George V red penny stamp. It was addressed to Glebe Road, but with no house number, and was finally delivered last October to No 72, which has been owned by Philip and Rosalie Nicholson for the last 30 years. Mr Nicholson said the house was empty at the time and he didn't know who had delivered it. *D.Mirror*, Sun, 15 Oct 2020.

- A postcard from Benidorm arrived in Braintree, Essex, 28 years late. Jim Green, 66,

received the card he sent in 1991 to his parents, both now deceased. "Had a good flight over. Everything's OK," it began. The decorator now lives in the family home. *Metro*, 24 Oct 2020.

- A Hallowe'en card posted in 1920 was delivered 100 years later to a house 50 miles away in Michigan. *Sun*, 1 Nov 2020.

- A card lost in the post for 65 years found its way to its intended recipient shortly before last Christmas. Chris Hermon was sent the card when he was a boy. He finally got it after a charity shop worker tracked him down. The sender was Fred Kendall, a family friend who was a publisher in New Jersey.



The card featured a New York skyscraper and was postmarked Grand Central Station, 13 October 1955. It read: "I will try and find you some Indian curios for your 10th birthday. It's a big event." The card never reached Mr Hermon's family home in Peacehaven, East Sussex, but re-surfaced at a charity shop in Dorchester, Dorset, as part of a stamp collection fundraising appeal by Weldmar Hospicecare. One of the shop volunteers found Mr Hermon, now living in Pershore, Worcestershire, on Facebook and contacted him about the card. *<i>6 Jan 2021.*

- In July 1943, William Myler Caldwell, 18, known as Bill, wrote a postcard to his uncle Fred in Aigburth, Liverpool, after his first week training with the Navy, saying he was "finally in blue" and "liking it all right". The card, which showed the figurehead of *HMS Raleigh*, was posted in Cornwall and took 77 years and seven months to arrive, popping through the letterbox on 12 February 2021. Luckily, a relative still lived in the terraced house. Bill Caldwell gained the rank of able seaman and won four medals. He was on the first boat into Nagasaki after the Americans dropped the atom bombs on Japan. He died of cancer in 1996. His daughter Elizabeth Caldwell, 58, said: "To actually see his handwriting was beautiful." *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mirror*, *D.Mail*, 15 Feb 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### FLOATING STASH

A snorkeler swimming off the Florida Keys came across a huge stash of cocaine worth around £1.2million (\$1.6m) inside a bin bag bobbing in the water. Twenty-five bricks of the Class A drug were found stuffed inside the floating bale. Border Patrol agents were contacted by the unnamed "Good Samaritan" after they discovered the "large black bundle wrapped in tape", weighing around 31kg (68lb). *D.Mirror*, 7 Mar 2021.

### EXOTIC ITEMS

In 2020, Republic of Ireland Revenue Commissioners seized over £27.5m worth of illegal cigarettes, £38.5m worth of illegal drugs, 326 weapons, as well as a number of "exotic items" including one crocodile head, some vintage antique African carved heads worth £292, and a "possible bone/ivory item" worth £86, as well as a single turtle shell worth around £43. *Irishexaminer.com*, 7 Mar 2021.

### GEORDIE WINDPOWER

Ten 'sewer gas destructor lamps' built in the Victorian and Edwardian eras are still standing over 100 years later in North Tyneside, Newcastle. Installed at various points above the sewers, they allowed excess methane gas to augment the normal gas supply. Invented in 1895 in an example of Victorian ingenuity, one lamp was capable of venting an area of up to three-quarters-of-a-mile of sewer, burning 24 hours a day, and were operational until around 1950. *chroniclelive.co.uk*, 24 Feb 2021.

### DEAD GO BATHING

Coastal erosion aggravated by weeks of rain caused hundreds of coffins to plunge 90ft (27m) into the Ligurian Sea after a landslide hit a clifftop graveyard in Camogli, a village near Genoa, on 18 February. The coastguard set up booms to stop about 200 coffins drifting off, and only a dozen were immediately recovered. Many had broken open in the landslide. *Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 24 Feb 2021.

### A BIT STALE

A piece of toast from a German soldier's canteen, saved by a British soldier during World War I, has sold at auction for £55. *Sun*, 21 Mar 2021.





## SIDELINES...

### FULL FRONTAL

A self-proclaimed Taoist master who says he can enlarge women's breasts using "ancient witchcraft" is being investigated for fraud in China. One happy client said: "I can feel my breasts bulging". *Met-ro*, 24 Mar 2021.

### DOG IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

A Chinese zoo was criticised after being caught displaying a Rottweiler-like dog in a wolf enclosure. A visitor asked zoo staff what was going on, and was told there had been a wolf, but that it had "died of old age", and that the dog, which had been raised as a watchdog by the zoo, was only being kept there temporarily. *BBC News*, 5 Mar 2021.

### THE STING

Moths that munch holes in fabrics at stately homes have met their match in the form of a 0.5mm parasitoid wasp, which kills them off. The National Trust is beginning a trial with the insects to battle the common or 'webbing' clothes moths at Blickling Hall in Norfolk, along with moth pheromones that disrupt mating. *D.Mail*, 17 Feb 2021.

### SURVIVAL STRATEGY

A study in *Current Biology* suggests that a plant has evolved to hide from humans. For most of its evolution, the *Frillaria delavayi* flower had no natural predators. Nothing eats it: it need fear no grazers, so it stood proud and colourful on Chinese hillsides. It has long been used in Chinese medicine for treating lung conditions, but high prices recently have led to increased harvesting, and in the mountains of Sichuan province it has changed colour to dull greys and browns. *Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 21 Nov 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

## SATAN'S SHOES | High-end trainers prove to be America's latest spiritual battleground



ABOVE: Lil Nas X with one of the controversial '666' Satanic trainers.

In collaboration with rapper Lil Nas X, the 'conceptual art collective' MSCHF (mischief, presumably) has produced a limited edition of 666 customised Nike Air Max 97 trainers, each of which contains a drop of human blood. The creative collaboration was intended to promote the Lil Nas X song 'Montero (Call Me By Your Name)', released in March 2021 and immediately topping the USA's Billboard Hot 100, *Rolling Stone* Top 100 and the UK's singles charts; it also hit big in many other countries. The single cover features Lil Nas X as both Adam and God in a reinterpretation of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*. As with some of Lil Nas X's previous work, the lyrics feature LGBT themes. The song's subtitle references the 2017 film by director Luca Guadagnino, *Call Me By Your Name*, a coming-of-age drama about a romance between two young men.

The sneakers are primarily black, but the number of each pair is printed in red (e.g. '4/666'), as is 'Luke 10:18', the biblical verse that reads: "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven". The 'Satan shoes' quickly sold out online, arousing the ire of conservative politicians, but also that of Nike themselves, who complained that "sophisticated sneakerheads" would be "confused" by the custom trainers, assuming them to be official Nike products.

The company issued a lawsuit preventing MSCHF from posting the shoes out to customers, even though all 666 pairs had already been purchased. The company's legal documents said MSCHF had "materially altered" its trainers "to prominently feature a Satanic theme... without Nike's approval or authorisation".

In response, MSCHF, which describes itself as engaging in "fashion, art, tech and capitalism in various, often unexpected mediums", insisted the sneakers were not pirated or imitation Nikes but were instead works of art, and denied they would corrupt American youth and ensnare them in Devil-worship. Nike rejected the work-of-art claim, on the basis that MSCHF "did not create a single shoe-shaped sculpture to sit in a museum" but had instead "created hundreds of shoes emblazoned with a NikeSwoosh that it sold to allcomers".

"We are not affiliated with Nike," a statement on the MSCHF website read, "as we have consistently iterated to the press. We were honestly surprised by the action Nike has taken, and immediately after Nike's counsel sent us notice we reached out but received no response." They added that the 'Satan Shoes' project had "started a conversation, while also living natively in its space" (whatever that means). Lil Nas X had offered the final pair of the shoes as a competition prize, but

was compelled to announce to his disappointed followers: "Sorry guys, I'm legally not allowed to give the 666th away anymore because of the crying nerds on the Internet. I feel like it's fucked up they have so much power they can get shoes cancelled. Freedom of expression gone out the window."

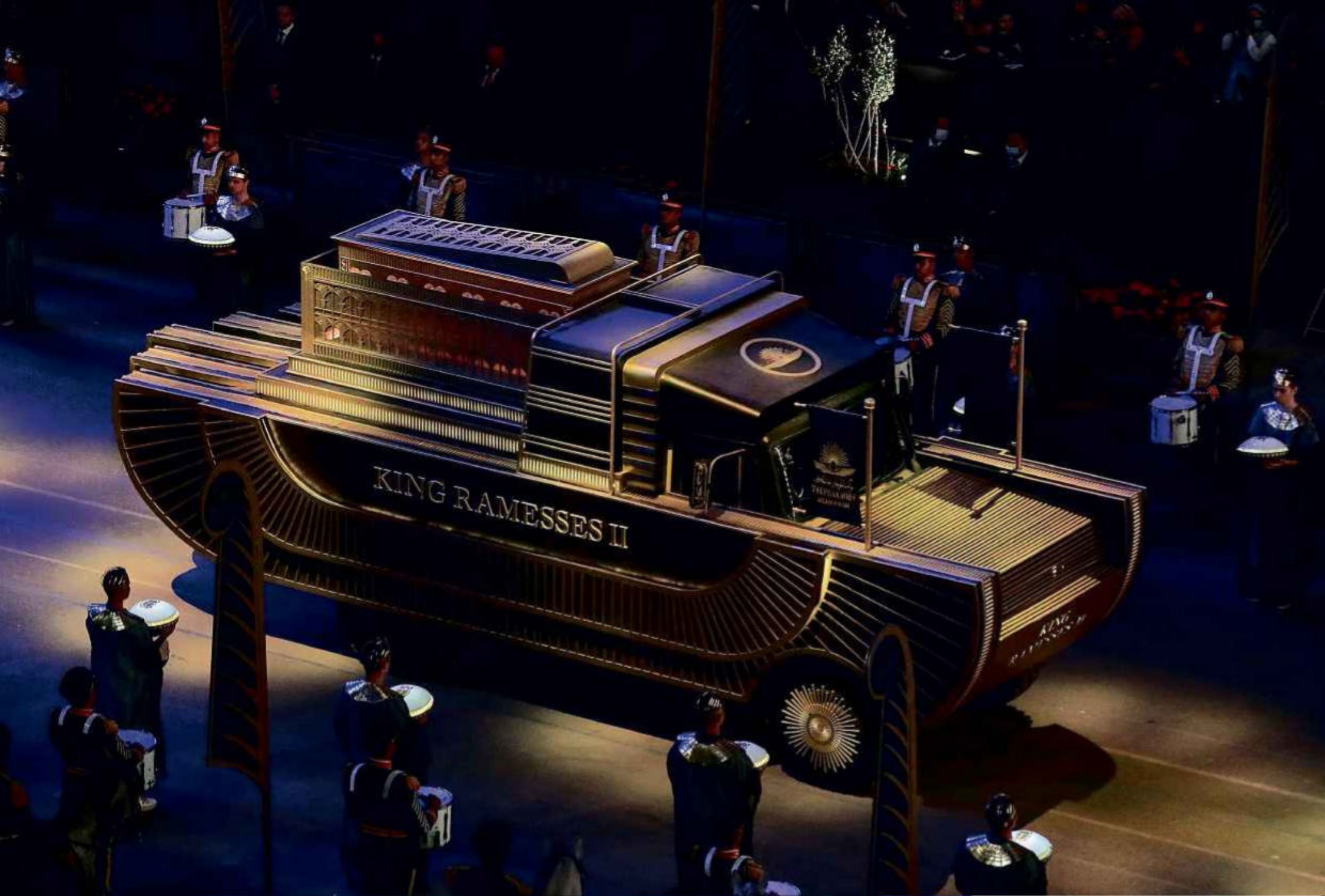
MSCHF's statement insisted the shoes were "art created for people to observe, speculate on, purchase and own," adding: "Satan is as much part of the art historical canon as Jesus, from Renaissance Hellmouths to Milton." The collective had previously produced a batch of all-white 'Jesus shoes' containing holy water, to which, given the lack of legal action, Nike apparently had no objection. *Guardian*, 3 Apr 2021.

- In 2019, Evangelical churchgoer Ben Kirby was watching a performance of worship songs on YouTube when he noticed that the lead singer was sporting a pair of Yeezy branded sneakers that cost nearly as much as his monthly rent bill. Kirby posted to his Instagram account, with its 400 followers: "Hey Elevation Worship, how much you paying your musicians that they can afford \$800 kicks? Let me get on the payroll!"

This was the genesis of Kirby's new Instagram account – @PreachersNSneakers – which follows the footwear worn by American spiritual leaders and posts screenshots of pastors, their shoes and the hefty price tags attached to them. Within a month, Kirby's account had gained 100,000 followers. "I began asking, how much is too much?" Kirby said. "Is it okay to get rich off of preaching about Jesus? Is it okay to be making twice as much as the median income of your congregation?" He has gone on to showcase Seattle pastor Judah Smith's \$3,600 Gucci jacket, Miami pastor Guillermo Maldonado's \$2,541 Ricci crocodile belt and Trump pastoral advisor Paula White's \$785 Stella McCartney sneakers. *Washington Post*, 22 Mar; *Church Times*, 1 April 2021.

MSCHF





## MUMMIES ON THE MOVE

A procession of floats carrying the mummified remains of 22 pharaohs passed through Cairo on the evening of 3 April, making a four-mile journey from their previous home in the old Egyptian Museum on Tahrir Square to their new resting place in the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation in the suburb of Fustat. The eye-catching procession, dubbed the “Pharaohs’ Golden Parade”, saw 18 kings and four queens travel in order – the oldest first – each aboard a separate vehicle decorated in ancient Egyptian style. The grand spectacle was broadcast live on Egyptian state television. Some superstitious Egyptians suggested that the moving mummies had triggered a curse responsible for such recent disasters as the week-long blockage of the Suez Canal (see p.5), but Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi argued that the parade of mummified monarchs, including Seqenenre Tao II, who reigned over southern Egypt some 1,600 years before Christ, Ramesses II and Queen Hatshepsut, was “further proof of the greatness... of a unique civilisation that extends into the depths of history.” *D.Telegraph*, 4+9 April 2021. PHOTOS: Khaled Desouki/Mahmoud Khaled/AFP via Getty Images





PAUL SIEVEKING digs up the latest discoveries, including a zodiac dish and a mediæval snail man



SOTHEBY'S

## ZODIAC DISH

The 13th century was one of the greatest eras for Islamic art, and Persia was at its centre; but alongside the prevailing Islamic culture, a counterculture of astrology thrived among the elite. Stunning evidence of the ruling classes' zeal for the zodiac has surfaced in the form of a magnificent silver-inlaid scalloped basin. Expected to fetch £1.5 million when auctioned by Sotheby's on 31 March, it sparked a bidding war that saw the price soar to £3.1 million. The basin was acquired by a private collector in the middle of the last century and has never been exhibited. Crafted in the shape of the Sun, it features the 12 signs of the zodiac, solar symbols, planets, animal heads and anthropomorphic calligraphic scripts. It was probably made in Herat for a high-ranking individual or the ruler himself at the start of the 13th century, and used for ritual washing. It's not the kind of thing that would ever be found in a sacred setting such as a mosque or a mausoleum. *Observer*, 21 Feb; *thenationalnews.com*, 31 Mar 2021.

## MEDIAEVAL SATIRE?

This strange silver-gilt object, just over 2cm long, depicting a praying knight emerging from a snail shell on the back of a goat, is thought to date from AD 1200 to 1350, and might have been a form of mediæval 'meme'. It was unearthed by a metal detectorist in Pontefract, West Yorkshire, in September 2020. While depictions of snail combat are a "mysterious mediæval phenomenon", the "mount's more comical fusion of snail and man remains

unexplained", according to Beverley Nenck, curator of later mediæval collections at the British Museum. "This unusual silver-gilt mount may once have been attached to a leather belt or strap, or perhaps worn as a badge. The image... implies an element of parody or satire. Snails are often depicted in the margins of mediæval illuminated decorated manuscripts and are thought to symbolise cowardice, and this may be the intended meaning. The mount may be a satirical reference to cowardly or non-chivalric behaviour of opponents in battle, or as a parody of the upper or knightly classes." Nenck said satire was often found in mediæval material culture, with one of the most popular visual gags being a monkey, in place of a doctor, examining a flask of urine for its clarity and colour – the go-to method for diagnosing mediæval ailments. *Guardian*, 22 Mar; *Yorkshire Post*, 23 Mar 2021.



HAMPSHIRE CULTURAL TRUST

LEFT: The 13th century Persian zodiac dish that fetched £3.1 million at auction in March. ABOVE: An 11th century Chinese Northern Song Dynasty coin found in a field in Hampshire by a metal detectorist. BELOW: Another unexpected detectorist discovery – this one from Pontefract, West Yorkshire – is this curious mediæval 'snail man'.

## MEDIAEVAL LINKS WITH CHINA

For the second time in three years, an 11th-century Chinese coin has been found in England, a possible indication that mediæval trade between England and the Far East was more widespread than previously thought. The first discovery of a Northern Song Dynasty coin was made in Cheshire in 2018. At the time, British Museum researchers wrote: "It is doubtful that this is a genuine mediæval find (i.e. present in the country due to trade and lost accidentally) but more likely a more recent loss from a curated collection."

The second 11th century coin – 0.98in in diameter and made of copper-alloy – was recently discovered with a metal detector in a field in Hampshire. Cambridge historian Caitlin Green argues that the presence of two similar coins increases the likelihood of them being genuine mediæval finds. She points to documentary evidence that an Englishman served as an envoy from the Mongol emperor Ghengis Khan in the 1240s, which could explain the presence of the Chinese coins in England. Records also indicate that a Mongol envoy visited Edward II in 1313. Treasure hunters uncovered both 11th-century coins near areas that have produced similar medieval artefacts. The more recent coin was unearthed about 20 miles away from the only confirmed mediæval Chinese pottery in England, a fragment of blue and white porcelain from a small cup or bowl.

The 2018 discovery was part of a group of 24 finds, including two Roman coins; two late mediæval lead weights; and 15



post-mediaeval artefacts. Green wrote that documentary sources “make reference to both the presence of people from Britain and Ireland in East Asia and the presence of people who have, or may have, travelled from these regions in Britain during the 13th and 14th centuries.”

According to *Ancient History Encyclopedia*’s Mark Cartwright, the Northern Song Dynasty controlled China from AD 960 to 1125. During this period, China’s economy was booming: cities like Kaifeng became known for their printing, paper, textile and porcelain industries. These goods were sold along the Silk Road. The Chinese exchanged a number of artefacts, such as a 14th-century vessel known as the ‘Marco Polo jar’, with Europeans during the mediaeval era. The coins in England were likely minted during the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song, who ruled from AD 1067 to 1085 and were in circulation after the dynasty ended in the 1120s. Many of these coins were so well made that more than 200 years later, 88 per cent of Chinese coins in circulation were produced during the Northern Song era.

## FAR FLUNG BEADS

At least 10 ornamental blue glass beads, the size of blueberries and made in Venice, arrived in the Americas decades before Columbus. Punyik Point, a mile from the Continental Divide in the Brooks Range of Alaska, on ancient trade routes from the Bering Sea to the Arctic Ocean, was a seasonal camp for generations of inland Eskimos. Two pierced turquoise beads were found here in the 1960s. Archæologists returned in 2004 and 2005, and found three more beads, this time near some copper bangles and other metal bits that might have been part of a necklace or bracelet. Wound around one of the metal bangles was twine, probably the inner bark of a shrub willow, which has now been carbon-dated along with charcoal found nearby to between 1440 and 1480, long before Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492. This result was later backed up by similar dating on objects found near the same type of beads at two other Arctic Alaska sites. “We almost fell over backwards,” said Mike Kunz, who co-authored the research published in *American Antiquity*.

Archaeologists often find European “trade beads” at Native American sites; famously, Dutchman Peter Minuit included trade beads in his deal for Manhattan Island in 1626. But how did the Alaska beads – found at no other site west of the Rockies – make their way from Italy more than 10,000 miles away to a plateau in Alaska? Fifteenth century Venetian craftsmen traded with people throughout Asia. The beads might have travelled in a horse-drawn cart east along the Silk Road. From there, they must have found their way into the aboriginal hinterlands, and on to the Russian Far East. A trader



may have tucked them into his kayak on the western shore of the Bering Sea. The crossing of the Bering Strait at its narrowest is about 52 miles (84km). The beads found at Punyik Point and two other sites probably arrived at an ancient trading centre called Shashalik, north of today’s Kotzebue and just west of Noatak. From there they were carried deep into the Brooks Range. Someone at Punyik Point might have strung them into a necklace. *news.uaf.edu*, 4 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 8 Feb 2021.

## OLDEST BEER FACTORY

What could be the oldest known high-production brewery in the world has been unearthed in the burial ground of Abydos, in the Egyptian desert west of the Nile, more than 280 miles (450km) south of Cairo. It apparently dates back to the time of King Narmer, widely known for his unification of ancient Egypt at the beginning of the first dynastic period (3150-2613 BC). It consists of eight huge units, each 20m (66ft) long and 2.5m (8ft) wide. Each unit includes about 40 pottery basins in two rows, used to heat a mixture of grains and water to produce beer. Each basin was held in place by clay levers, placed vertically in the form of rings. Abydos was known for monuments honouring Osiris, the god of the underworld responsible for judging souls in the afterlife. It is thought the brewery was built here to lubricate royal rituals. Evidence was found for the use of beer in sacrificial rituals in engravings found at the site. About 22,400 litres (12,730 pints) of beer was made at a time.

The necropolis was used in every period of Egyptian history, from the prehistoric age to Roman times. A British archæologist found evidence of brewing in the area in 1912, but did not locate the site. [AP] *theguardian.com*, *irishexaminer.com*, 13 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 15 Feb; *al-monitor*, 24 Feb 2021.

**LEFT:** One of the pottery basins used in the brewery complex unearthed in Abydos. **BELOW:** The ‘Venus of Willendorf’ figurine, found in Austria in 1908.

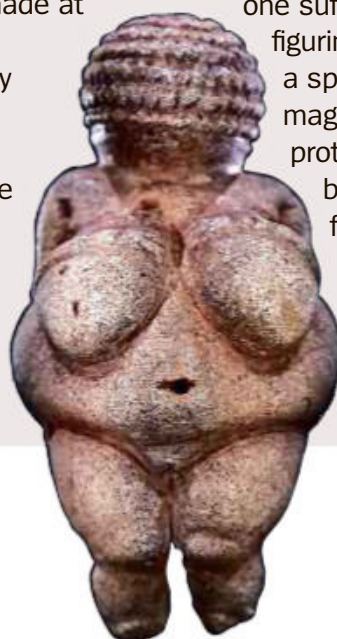
## VENUS FIGURINES

The mystery behind the enigmatic ‘Venus’ figurines carved some 30,000 years ago may have been solved. The hand-held depictions of obese or pregnant women were long seen as symbols of fertility or beauty; but according to Richard Johnson, a professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, the key to understanding the statues lies in climate change and diet. “Some of the earliest art in the world are these mysterious figurines of overweight women from the time of hunter gatherers in Ice Age Europe where you would not expect to see obesity at all,” he said. “We show that these figurines correlate to times of extreme nutritional stress.”

Early modern humans entered Europe during a warming period about 48,000 years ago. Known as Aurignacians, they hunted reindeer, horses and mammoths with bone-tipped spears. In summer they dined on berries, fish, nuts and plants. But the climate did not remain static. As temperatures dropped, ice sheets advanced and disaster set in. During the coldest months, temperatures plunged to minus 10-15 degrees Celsius. Some bands of hunter-gatherers died out, others moved south, some sought refuge in forests. Big game was overhunted.

It was during these desperate times that the obese Venus figurines appeared. They ranged between 6cm and 16cm (2in and 6in) tall and were made of stone, ivory, horn – or occasionally clay. Some were threaded and worn as amulets. Johnson and his colleagues measured the statues’ waist-to-hip and waist-to-shoulder ratios. Those found closest to the glaciers were more obese than those located further away. It is thought the figurines represented an idealised body type for these difficult living conditions. “We propose they conveyed ideals of body size for young women, and especially those who lived in proximity to glaciers,” said Johnson. “We found that body size proportions were highest when the glaciers were advancing, whereas obesity decreased when the climate warmed and glaciers retreated.” Obesity, according to the researchers, became a desired condition. An obese female in times of scarcity could carry a child through pregnancy better than

one suffering malnutrition. So the Venus figurines may have been imbued with a spiritual meaning – a fetish or magical charm of sorts that could protect a woman through pregnancy, birth and nursing. Many Venus figurines are well worn, indicating that they were heirlooms passed down from mother to daughter through generations. *scitechdaily.com*, 1 Dec 2020.







# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 259: MOMENT OF TOOTH

‘Or a Christian Scientist and a toothache – neither exists in the final sense: also neither is absolutely non-existent, and, according to our therapeutics, the one that more highly approximates to realness will win.’ – Fort, *Books*, p23

Two ubiquitous clichés: modern dentistry is a prime reason for not wanting to live in the past, and their (supposedly) healthy Mediterranean diet gave the Greeks and Romans relatively healthy dentition – no sugar, but Roman use of lead acetate as sweetener can’t have helped. Both need qualifications. Ancient dentists from Egypt on could diagnose gum diseases, fill cavities, do forceps extractions, and construct bridgework to retain loose teeth.

British dentistry took long to advance. My boyhood experiences included extractions done with chloroform pads, then nitrous oxide, finally advancing to Novocain. On a stall in Lincoln market, along with spectacles, you could buy second-hand/mouth dentures.

Tooth-powders were the normal cleansers. Scribonius Largus (cf. my piece in *Rheinisches Museum* 135, 1992, 75-82), one of Claudius’s doctors, mentions that used by Empress Messalina, the first example of big-name product endorsement. Contrariwise, when Apuleius (*Apology*, ch6, 2nd-cent. AD) sent a concoction of his own to a friend with concomitant poem, he was accused of witchcraft. More exotic was the Spaniard Egnatius, ridiculed by Catullus (Poem 39) for brushing his teeth with urine, an ammoniac practice confirmed by historians Diodorus (bk5 paras33-5) and Strabo (bk3 ch164).

Toothpicks go back (on archaeological records) at least to Neanderthals. Petronius’s vulgar host Trimalchio (*Satyricon* 33) ‘excavated’ (*perforavit*) his teeth with a silver one to impress the guests – the Latin verb is a nice intensive for dental archaeology.

Pliny (*Natural History*, bk7 ch16 paras68-72) says Agrippina was born with a double set (exceedingly rare condition called Hyperdontia), said to be a sign of bad luck. True enough: she produced Nero (born feet-first), her eventual killer. Also, bad luck for girl babies to be born with teeth. Pliny subjoins that Turduli tribesmen had more teeth than everyone else, also (mysteriously) that teeth had prophetic powers. Perhaps true in the case of a different kind of royal, punk king Johnny Rotten, thus christened by fellow-Pistol Steve Jones for his decaying mushy-tushy-pegs.

Caches of teeth going back c. 13,000 years, plus one in Slovenia (discovered 2012), also 86 snappers found (1987) in a Roman Forum shop floor-drain betray the painful nature of antique dental treatments, particularly revealing as regards fillings, for which (e.g.) beeswax, bitumen, hair, vegetable fibres were used.

False teeth were variously made from animal bones, ivory, and (cf. George Washington’s famous set, now disputed) wood. Such dentures were not always reliably held in place: fleeing from a farting statue, the witches Canada and Sagana lost both teeth and wigs (Horace, *Satires*, bk 1 no8 v48). More sophisticated-looking were the gold bridging wires and jewelled studs for which the Etruscans and Mayans

were famous. The former probably inspired this curious prescription (10.10) in the early *Roman Laws of the Twelve Tables*: “But him, whose teeth shall have been fastened with gold, if person shall bury or burn him with that gold, it shall be with impunity.” This same code (7.10) also prescribes a fine of 300

asses (small Roman coin) for those who knock out a freeman’s tooth, 150 if victim is a slave. Identical penalties feature in Hammurabi’s Law Code (nos. 200-1).

So, the Law had teeth. Likewise, the 46 Biblical (mainly OT) dental verses. Most are of the weeping and gnashing variety, plus Tooth-for-Tooth retributions. Most striking is the divine claim at Amos 4. 6: “But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities.”

The first (and only) ancient celebrity dentist was high Egyptian official Hesy-Ra (third dynasty). One of his eight grand-sounding titles was Great One of the Dentists; another, proclaiming his Magician status, should have encouraged patients. No shortage of these for him, or other practitioners mentioned in papyri texts and inscriptions. Archaeological findings estimate that circa 18 per cent of Egyptians, including royals, had terrible teeth. King Tut was buck-toothed (think Cilla Black), but at least did not have the metal braces and retainers endured by North American children. Still, there must have been many ancient examples of Hugh Grant teeth and Martin Amis-style cosmetic expenditures.

A Sumerian text (c. 5000 BC) claims worms were a prime source of dental decay, a belief found in other countries, persistent down to the Middle Ages. Scribonius Largus prescribed fumigations from hyoscyamus seeds to get rid of small wrigglers.

One indication of dental decay is bad breath, common enough to evoke a crop of jokes (*Philogelos*, nos231-42; cf. my annotated 1983 translation), also Marcus Aurelius’s unconvincing prescription (*Meditations*, bk5 ch28) for dealing with it: philosophical understanding – no doubt he had plenty of chances to practise this when dealing with low-born petitioners. Not restricted to the poor, though: Aristotle (*Politics*, para1311b30f – significant he should discuss this) says Euripides was orally malodorous.

Lots of ways people were separated from their gnashers. War, most obviously: Homer is full of teeth-smashed warriors, often accompanied by eyes popping from sockets. Combat sports, also: *Ælian (Historical Miscellany*, bk10 ch19) describes how boxer Euryalus swallowed his smashed teeth to prevent the dental debris being seen. Edentulate fighters are frequently described and ridiculed in classical epigrams.

Scribonius Largus (no214) deals with knocked-out teeth. Plautus (*Bacchylides*, act4 sc2 v23) mentions marauding hooligans (*Dentifrangibuli* = Tooth-Smashers). So does Juvenal (*Satire* 3 v301): meeting one such, “Pray you’ll get home with a few teeth left,” A Martial epigram (bk14 no68) urges masters not to punch out the teeth of an offending slave.

“Toothache ranks amongst the greatest torments.” Few would disagree with Roman doctor Celsus (*On Medicine*, bk6 ch9), though most would have qualms about his proposed remedies, such as wrapping a stingray tail around the offending tooth to loosen it. Not to mention Pliny’s (bk32 ch26 paras79-80) recommended scraping the tooth with fish-bones, then applying a boiled frog or pouring on a decoction of 46 frogs’ livers.

Royal physician Galen goes further (*On the Composition of Drugs*, ch12 para 861b) with his boiled-up headless cockroach fat – worse, if you follow the alternative Greek adjective in his text – ‘farting’.

Roman and Byzantine sources run the gamut from Theodore Prodromos’s *Demios*, or *The Executioner*, a 12th-century account as wincing as Laurence Olivier in *Marathon Man* of a dentist who slits the gums, uses a probe the size of an elephant’s tusk, and smashes the tooth in half, to the Christian martyr Apollonia, who responded to having her teeth broken by torture by declaring herself as patron saint of toothache sufferers.

“How much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as tooth decay in his divine system of creation?” – Joseph Heller’s Yossarian, *Catch 22*.





# THE C NSPIRASPHERE

Reptilian shape-shifters; the assassination of Princess Diana; the Bilderberger Group and the Illuminati. Is there a conspiracy Prince Philip wasn't involved in? asks **NOEL ROONEY**.

## THE PROTEAN PRINCE

The death of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh (see pp.18-21), produced, according to the UK media, a spontaneous wave of national mourning. And so it may be, despite the avalanche of complaints received by the national broadcasters from people objecting to the wall-to-wall coverage of the (perhaps not totally unexpected) royal demise. The media mourning was perfectly understandable; for decades, Prince Philip had provided them with a stream of stories evidencing his eccentric take on ethnicity and decidedly left-field (and right-wing) patrician wit.

The Conspirasphere, too, will miss the Duke. Over the many years of his public life, Prince Philip was celebrated (if that's the appropriate term) by conspiracy theorists in all manner of ways. Two streams of thought in particular revolved around the persona of the late royal consort: his alleged involvement in the mysterious death of Princess Diana; and his membership of the shape-shifting alien reptile race that, in the grand narrative proposed by David Icke and others of his ilk, has ruled the world for millennia.

When Princess Diana died, in a car crash in a Parisian subway in 1997, the tragedy produced an immediate slew of theories claiming that her death was anything but an accident. Most famously, perhaps, Mohammad al Fayed, the father of Diana's then paramour, Dodi, accused Philip of being the mastermind behind her assassination, acting in cahoots with MI6 and the French secret service. Fayed's allegations were given something of a posthumous boost by the story that Diana had had a premonition of her demise; she apparently told friends that she would be bumped off by irate Royals and the murder would



## *Shape-shifting reptiles from outer space were the real rulers*

be made to look like a car accident.

Why Philip, who by all accounts was quite fond of his erstwhile daughter-in-law, should have orchestrated her murder (as opposed to, say, Prince Charles, whose relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles might have given him more of a motive, in a desperate, late-night game of Cluedo sort of way) remains something of a puzzle in itself. But the Diana mystery has retained a kind of public traction that few conspiracy theories achieve; and part of that mystique rests on the perceived involvement of royalty in skulduggery of the basest kind. Plus, of course, Diana and Dodi didn't actually die in the crash; they are alive and well, living on a tropical island, bringing up the baby destined to usurp the British throne.

When David Icke began to promote the idea that shape-shifting reptiles from outer (or inner, in some renditions) space were the real rulers of the world, the British Royal family took centre stage (see **FT129:28-32**). At first glance, Philip was not the most obvious candidate for the role; he had, after all, merely

married into the family. But he was a distant cousin of Elizabeth, and interbreeding was central to the whole reptilian idea.

Icke claimed that he had met hundreds of people, in over 50 countries, who

had seen the shape-shifting actually take place. Many of these people claimed that they had seen members of the Royal family morph into lizards and back into human shape again, and Philip's name and face were prominent among these claims. There were some who insisted (clearly in the worst possible taste) that the Duke's human face was actually quite reptilian, at least in later life, and that this alleged resemblance was proof of the story's veracity. This, and claims that he was one of the secret founders of the Bilderberg Club, afforded Philip a legendary status in the Conspirasphere, one that will no doubt outlive his mortal coil.

Given all this history, it is no surprise that his death should have provoked a raft of conspiracy theories in its own right. When a shape-shifting reptilian murder mastermind dies, even at the grand old age of 99, the natural effects of old age and illness are way down the list of likely causes, in some views.

The most flippant story, which went viral almost immediately, was that HRH died after taking a drink of McDonald's Sprite. This seems about as likely a story as a prince of the realm turning up at Domino's to pick up a pizza, though what it lacks in plausibility it makes up for in addled wit. And it led me to waste some minutes of my life wondering

if any member of the Royal family, living or dead, had ever tasted a McDonald's product; which just goes to show what exotic rabbit holes conspiracy theorising can lead you down.

The theory that has attracted most attention grew incrementally in the days and weeks following his death. First, it was claimed that Philip died from an adverse reaction to the Covid vaccine; something of a delayed reaction, since he'd had the vaccine three months earlier. Then the story was enhanced by a process of rather advanced dot-connecting.

He was not supposed to die from the vaccine as, like other member of the Illuminati/lizard elite, he should have been buffered by taking Adrenochrome, the miracle medicine harvested from foetuses and otherwise imbibed by eating babies (see **FT392:4, 395:28, 402:5**). But when the good ship *Ever Given* managed to sail sideways and block the Suez Canal (see p5), supplies of Adrenochrome were cut off, and the unfortunate Prince succumbed to the effects of the Bill Gates depopulation programme.

This inversely proved that Philip was a member of the Satanic elite, as did the numerology of his death. He died on 9 April at the age of 99; and obviously, if you line those numbers up, and turn them upside down (and why wouldn't you?) you get 666. Oh, and Q (where are they now?) predicted his death on 9 April 2020 in a drop that contained the phrase 'scot free'. QED.

**SOURCES:** [www.rd.com/article/prince-philip-princess-diana-death-rumor/](http://www.rd.com/article/prince-philip-princess-diana-death-rumor/); [www.ibtimes.sg/prince-philip-died-after-having-mcdonalds-sprite-conspiracy-theory-floats-palace-silent-cause-56733](http://www.ibtimes.sg/prince-philip-died-after-having-mcdonalds-sprite-conspiracy-theory-floats-palace-silent-cause-56733); [www.comicsands.com/prince-philip-death-qanon-conspiracies-2652509489.html](http://www.comicsands.com/prince-philip-death-qanon-conspiracies-2652509489.html)





# A brand new physics?

DAVID HAMBLING asks if the latest discovery means it's time to abandon the Standard Model

New experimental findings from CERN threaten to derail the Standard Model of physics that has run smoothly for decades. Physicists are puzzled by the data, but also delighted that it may lead to answers to questions that the Standard Model will never resolve.

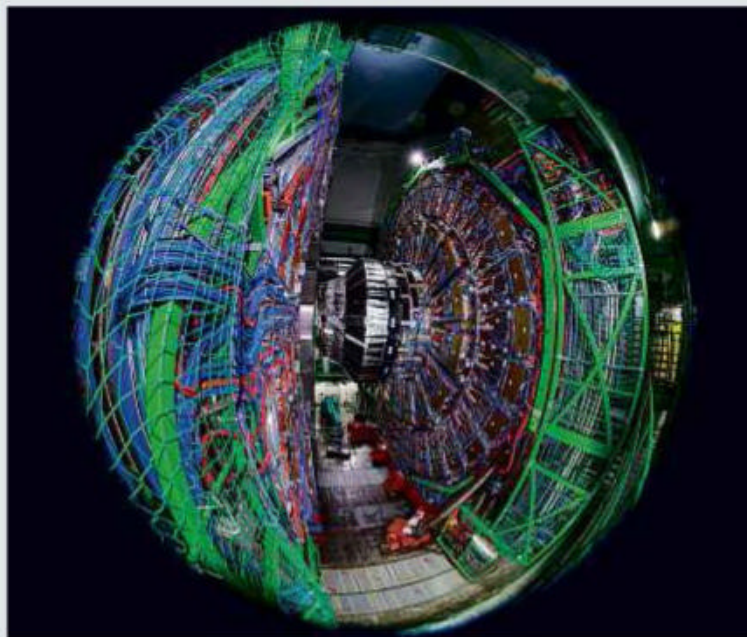
The Standard Model first emerged in the late 1970s. Since then it has become increasingly established as the accepted version of particle physics. At that time particle accelerators were turning up more and more new and inexplicable particles. The old trio of protons, electrons and neutrons, which make up ordinary matter, were crowded out by a bewildering number of fermions, bosons, leptons and others.

It was like the chaos that threatened to upset chemistry as scientists kept discovering new elements in the 19th century. Then Russian chemist Dimitri Mendeleev succeeded in corralling all the new findings in his Periodic Table (see **FT380:56-57**), explaining their properties by the number of protons in each element. The Periodic Table also predicted unknown new elements and their properties, elements that were later found. Mendeleev's work means we are reasonably confident we know of all the elements there are to know.

Similarly, the Standard Model uses three of the four known forces to explain the properties of all known particles. They are arranged in a kind of periodic table of particles that accounts for the mass, charge and spin of each. Again, the Standard Model also predicted new particles – the top quark, tau neutrino and, most famously, the Higgs boson. It took CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the giant 27km (17 mile) accelerator, to achieve this, finally confirming it in 2012 (see **FT292:16**).

This last discovery seemed to put the cherry on top of the Standard Model. Not only had the CERN researchers discovered the missing particle, during the hunt they also ruled out the existence of many other possible particles. It looked as though they were reaching the end of discovery, having mapped out the whole territory and validating the Standard Model as the last word. However, the neat pigeonholing of particles may have been ended by CERN's latest results.

The LHCb collaboration group analysed 10 years of data on B mesons, particles created in the accelerators that have a lifespan of a fraction of a nanosecond.



LEFT: The Compact Muon Solenoid detector assembly in the Large Hadron Collider.

Famous cases include the French Academy of Science, which in the 18th century refused to examine supposed meteorites on the grounds that since there were no stones in the sky, any alleged rocks from the heavens must be errors or hoaxes.

Though anomalous, the new data are welcomed because they might help with a bigger problem. The Standard Model does nothing to explain two of the biggest mysteries in modern physics: Dark Matter and Dark Energy. Normal matter makes up about 5% of the Universe, 26% is Dark Matter – an

unknown material which exerts gravity but has never been directly observed – and the remaining 69% is Dark Energy, an even more enigmatic entity that is causing the Universe to expand.

As long as physicists are stuck with the Standard Model, they cannot explain what makes up most of the Universe. However, the new discovery could pave the way for an extension or even a replacement of the Standard Model, with the possibilities of new families of particles or forces that might account for Dark Matter and Dark Energy.

Some researchers are already suggesting that the LHCb results may be caused by Z' (pronounced Z-prime) bosons, particles which exist in an extension of the Standard Model. Previous experiments have also seen evidence of Z' bosons, but again only at a three-sigma level. If they can be proven to exist, then determining their exact properties will point scientists towards what type of new physics is occurring.

Meanwhile, results of the G-2 muon experiment from Fermilab near Chicago announced on 7 April also challenge the Standard Model. Their results suggest that the particles have a different magnetic signature than the model predicts. Again, new particles may be involved.

"People were clapping and jumping up and down," said team member Lee Roberts at Boston University, describing the moment when the results were announced, "as much as you can do that on Zoom."

The Standard Model has been scientific orthodoxy for the working life of most physicists and it has served them well. But it may be time to pass on the baton and look for the next key to open the doors to the Universe.

When B mesons decay, they should produce equal numbers of electrons and their heavier but otherwise identical cousins, muons. However, the data shows a small but distinct dominance of electrons over muons.

"We were actually shaking when we first looked at the results, we were that excited," said Dr Mitesh Patel, from the Department of Physics at Imperial College London, one of the LHCb project leaders. Patel described it as the most exciting project he had been involved in during his 20 years as an experimental physicist.

The results are at the 'three sigma' level, meaning there is a one-in-a-thousand possibility that they would occur by chance. Further data are needed to reach the 'five sigma' level which takes the odds against them happening randomly to over one-in-three-and-a-half-million and is the accepted level for scientific proof. More work at CERN and sites such as Japan's Belle II may take it to five sigma – or send it back to the statistical starting point if they find the number of electrons and muons observed balancing out.

"We have seen sigmas come and go before. It happens surprisingly frequently," Prof Chris Parkes, an experimental particle physicist at the University of Manchester and LHCb spokesperson, told the *Guardian*.

Patel's excitement is that the anomaly hints at something occurring outside the Standard Model. It suggests a previously unsuspected force or particle that nudges B mesons towards the electron-decay path rather than the muon-decay path.

As Charles Fort noted, scientists usually hate anomalies that contradict their theories and prefer to ignore them.





# STRANGE JAMAICA

The status of Obeah is the subject of heated debate in Jamaica, but belief in this magical practice is widespread



ABOVE: An advert for a spiritual bath of the kind popular in the Caribbean, the United States and among Hispanic communities.

## OBEAH: FOR AND AGAINST

A recent letter to the *Jamaica Gleaner* highlighted the fact that law prohibiting the practice of Obeah (a system of spiritual/magical beliefs similar to Vodou/Voodoo) had still not been repealed, despite several other Caribbean countries having done so. Anguilla decriminalised Obeah in 1989, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and St Lucia in 1998, 2000 and 2004 respectively, and Guyana announced in 2018 that it would be removing the law from its books.

Jamaica's 122-year-old Obeah Act makes it illegal if "any person who, to effect any fraudulent or unlawful purpose, or for gain, or for the purpose of frightening any person, uses, or pretends to use any occult means, or pretends to possess any supernatural power or knowledge".

The letter writer, Mr Fitsroy Randall, recalls that in 2019, when the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) government announced it was to open a discussion on whether to repeal the Obeah Act, many Jamaicans and church groups joined together to fight the motion, on the basis that Obeah is inherently evil.

Mr Randall disagrees, and regards the criminalisation of Obeah as a legacy of colonialism, when African ancestral practices and beliefs were repressed by

the British in a bid to protect the system of slavery against uprisings. Obeah was first made illegal in 1760 in wake of Chief Tacky's Rebellion, during which rebel leaders sought advice from Obeahmen who encouraged the fighters and offered spiritual protection (reminiscent of the Bois Caiman ceremony that took place in Haiti in August 1791, at which, it is said, the revolutionaries successfully enlisted the help of the Vodou *lwa* to ensure their success in overthrowing French rule; see FT362:44-48).

Mr Randall insists that Obeah is not black magic or evil, but is in fact a system of "spiritual healing, justice-making and communicating with our ancestors and spirits." He insists that the Obeah Act is "a discriminatory colonial anachronism that favours European belief systems above all others" and suggests the continued ban on this African-derived practice is in contradiction to Jamaica's constitution which guarantees every citizen "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief".

However, another letter, published in the *Gleaner* three weeks later, took a very different view of the matter. Mr Gordon Russell took issue with the previous correspondent's

defence of Obeah, and described its claim that Obeah is not witchcraft as misleading. Mr Russell states there are "only two kingdoms vying for the allegiance of mankind." The first is the kingdom of light, headed by God, while the second is the kingdom of darkness led by Satan. Practices such as Obeah are, in Mr Russell's eyes, simply a deception by the Devil and designed to enslave mankind. Thus, the earlier letter's argument that the British colonial power's prohibition of Obeah was a continuation of enslavement is viewed by Mr Russell as entirely wrong and topsy-turvy: "Randall suggests that making Obeah illegal was an attempt... to keep our people enslaved, not recognising that the law was there to do the exact opposite," i.e. to prevent enslavement by Satan.

Evidently, Obeah and its prohibition are still subjects of great controversy in Jamaica today, engendering heated debates in the *Gleaner* and elsewhere. *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, 27 Nov; 17 Dec 2020.

## OBEAH SEX DEMON

An unpleasant episode recently demonstrated the continued prevalence of belief in Obeah among the younger as well as the older generations. A Jamaican college student browsing her Facebook page one evening in January 2021 received an unsolicited message that read: "Death is upon yuh, that traditional curse. Yuh have a very bright future, don't allow anyone to take it away. You are going to have to come and see mi personally, madam, or else yuh going to dead." The unknown man urged the woman to "set herself free" and not to allow "the enemy to beat her down."

The man told her she had been possessed by a sex demon and that she would die by the end of February. Initially unconcerned, the student gradually became more fearful as the man began telling her about events in her life that appeared true. He told her he was not only a 'reader man' but that he had the ability to free her

from the evil force that menaced her.

"Him start say mi need a spiritual bath and him send mi him number." A spiritual bath is a traditional method whereby herbs, leaves and oils are added to water so that the recipient may bathe in it and be cleansed of negative energies, or endowed with positive ones, and is a popular practice in the Caribbean, the US Hoodoo tradition, and in Caribbean diaspora communities worldwide.

As the end of February drew closer, the frightened student relented. "And mi, like a fool," she explained, "give the man mi number and him tell me to buy something to prepare the bath." She was told to purchase items including several green limes, a dried coconut, olive oil, and a bottle of rum. In all, she used \$8,000 Jamaican dollars (£37) from her savings, but was told to bring a further \$7,500 (£35) for candles, and \$1,300 cash (£6) as an altar offering.

It was only when she arrived at the man's residence that she began to sense something was wrong. "Mi tink him a guh [was going to] just do the bath, and take off whatever curse was upon me. Him carry mi outside and tell me to spin three times in front of a mirror and him pray and bruk [break] di coconut. Him carry mi back inside and say mi must take off mi clothes because mi have a sex demon on mi and in order fi him to remove the curse him have to get sexual with me." He apparently told the by now very suspicious young woman that all he needed her to do was to "rub him down". But while her memory of the precise order of events was unclear, she recalls him spraying something on her, then realised they were both naked. "I remember him telling mi to pray, and the next thing I know he was on top of mi." It was unclear at the time of writing whether the unfortunate woman had gone to the police to seek redress against this predatory and unscrupulous conman masquerading as an Obeah worker. *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, 18 Feb 2021.



# THE PRINCE & THE SAUCERS

DAVID CLARKE highlights HRH Prince Philip's lifelong interest in forteana

The death of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, aged 99 on 9 April has resulted in many tributes and obituaries; but few mentioned the Duke's lifelong interest in and curiosity about a range of fortean subjects including UFOs, crop circles and cryptozoology.

Other members of the British Royal family are known for dabbling in alternative beliefs, including the Duke's eldest son, Prince Charles. The Duke's uncle, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Admiral of the Fleet, is probably the best-known British Establishment figure who had publicly expressed his fascination with the UFO phenomenon. His involvement reached its peak during the first wave of public interest in the subject, between 1950-55 and declined during his time as Chief of Defence Staff at MoD from 1959-63. Mountbatten shared this fascination with his nephew Prince Philip, who served in the Royal Navy during WWII and married Princess Elizabeth in 1947. He became Duke of Edinburgh in 1952 when his wife became Queen following the death of George VI. It was after the new Queen's coronation that the Duke's interest in UFOs, or 'flying saucers' as they were then known, reached its height. Both Prince Philip and Mountbatten were subscribers to the English magazine *Flying Saucer Review*. According to its editor, Gordon Creighton, copies had been sent to Buckingham Palace since *FSR*'s inception in 1955.

RAF Air Marshal Sir Peter Horsley (1921-2001) was equerry to the Duke from 1952 to 55 and became drawn into the informal group of Establishment flying saucerers on taking up his post at Buckingham Palace. In his autobiography *Sounds from Another Room* (1998) Horsley said that during this period, much like Mountbatten: "Prince Philip was open to the immense possibilities of new technology leading to space exploration, while at the



*"He may not be a crank, but he's a bit too fanciful for me!"*

same time not discounting that, just as we were on the fringe of breaking out into space, so other older civilisations in the universe might already have done so."

In his book, Horsley revealed that reports of flying saucers were enthusiastically discussed at Buckingham Palace throughout his time as equerry. When Andy Roberts and I met Horsley in 2000 he told us that in 1952, following a sighting by RAF aircrew at Topcliffe in Yorkshire, Prince Philip "agreed that I could investigate the more credible reports [of flying saucers] provided I kept it all in perspective and did not involve his office in any kind of publicity or sponsorship."

As a result of his position in the RAF, Horsley was given carte blanche to read any reports and interview fighter pilots who had seen unusual phenomena in the sky. He told us that he had arranged, with the Duke's personal approval, for RAF Fighter Command to send copies of the latest 'flying saucer' reports made by aircrew for examination at Buckingham Palace. During our

meeting at his home in Hampshire he provided documentary evidence of these investigations, including papers from the informal study he conducted for Prince Philip. During his time as Royal UFO investigator Horsley quizzed two RAF Vampire pilots who spotted a flying saucer while on patrol from their base at West

Malling in Kent, one afternoon in November 1953. After the story made the front page of the *Daily Express* Horsley used subterfuge to visit the base and interviewed both men, telling them his motivation was purely out of personal interest. His report to Prince Philip said he was "satisfied that the Vampire crew was perfectly reliable"; and the two airmen had seen "a genuine UFO". One of them, Geoff Smythe, later told us that he was told by the station commander that Horsley was acting on behalf of the Duke of Edinburgh, who was collecting UFO stories.

Perhaps the strangest outcome of this inquiry was Peter Horsley's role in inviting a number of UFO witnesses to discuss their experiences at Buckingham Palace. These included the captain of a BOAC airliner, James Howard, who witnessed, along with other crew members and passengers, a strange formation of UFOs while flying over the North

Atlantic in June 1954. Another visitor to the Palace was schoolboy Stephen Darbishire, who obtained two photographs of a 'saucer' hovering above the slopes of the Lake District mountain, Conistone Old Man, in February of that year. Horsley explained his reason for inviting UFO witnesses to the Palace was partly to "put them on the spot" and test their honesty in the presence of royalty, a method as effective as any truth serum.

Horsley told us the sincerity of the RAF and civilian witnesses he interviewed was evident and this led him to conclude that UFOs were a real and unexplained phenomenon. But he was less impressed by the burgeoning UFO movement and what he described as "the growing body of people promoting sightings for mercenary reasons or self-advertisement." Among these less than objective influences he included Desmond Leslie (see **FT225:40-47**), who was on friendly terms with General Sir Frederick 'Boy' Browning. The General, who was the husband of author Daphne du Maurier, led the British airborne forces during the disastrous Operation Market Garden in 1943. In retirement Browning became a private secretary to the Queen and like other former military officers became fascinated by flying saucers. But Browning went further than any other Establishment figure by taking seriously the claims of those who said they had actually met the space people.

It was through a contact of Browning's that, in 1955, Horsley found himself drawn into a meeting with a strange individual at a London address who wished to discuss the flying saucer mystery. As the meeting progressed, this person, who called himself 'Mr Janus', asked him to reveal all he knew about the subject and, when questioned by Horsley as to the nature of his interest, said he wished to meet the Duke of Edinburgh.

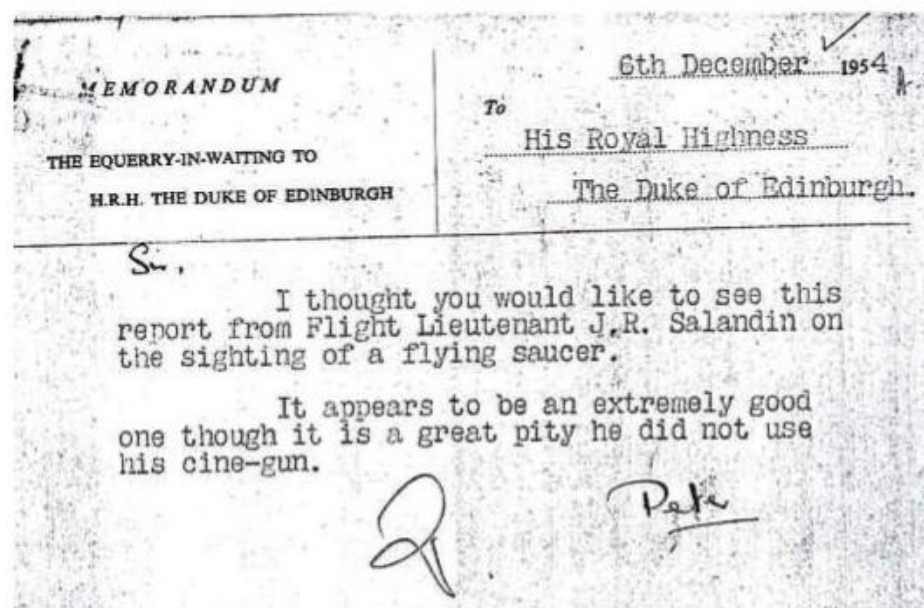




Horsley said he became increasingly uncomfortable and got the distinct impression that his own thoughts were being read, and scrutinised, by telepathy. Alarmed at the security implications, he drew the meeting to a close and reported the experience to Buckingham Palace. Days later he revisited the address, finding it was shuttered and empty, and all attempts to trace the mysterious man came to nothing. By the time of our interview Horsley had convinced himself that Janus was “an observer” from another world, even though Mr Janus never claimed to be anything out of the ordinary at the time. He would not entertain our suggestion that Janus could have been an MI5 agent who was testing his vulnerability or the possibility that he could leak official secrets. We felt the ET explanation might have arisen as a result of having read Timothy Good’s books on alien contact that were popular around the time he wrote up this story from memory.

Horsley’s involvement in the UFO contactee movement came to a head in 1959 when a plot was hatched to engineer a meeting between Prince Philip and the famous Polish-American author and mystic George Adamski. Adamski had co-authored the 1953 best-seller *Flying Saucers Have Landed* with Desmond Leslie, a former WWII Spitfire pilot who had his own contacts in the British Establishment. The book contained his personal account of a meeting with the Venusian pilot of a flying saucer ‘scout-ship’ that landed in the Mojave Desert in California and communicated with Adamski by telepathy. According to his account, the space people wished to warn us of the impending threat posed by nuclear weapons. Adamski’s message combined old-fashioned Spiritualism with the new craze for seeing flying saucers, and this appealed to many who feared for the future of planet Earth, including some members of European royalty.

In April of 1959 Adamski embarked on a European lecture tour that included an audience with the Dutch royal family.



Shortly before the 68-year-old contactee arrived in London, Desmond Leslie wrote to both Browning and the Duke, enclosing a personal invitation for them to meet Adamski, in strict secrecy if necessary. Prince Philip clearly realised the danger this could place him in as he annotated Leslie’s letter, preserved in the Imperial War Museum archives, with the words “Not on your Nellie!” In a note to Browning he added: “He may not be a crank but he’s a bit too fanciful for me!”

Despite Royal disapproval, both Browning and Horsley met Leslie and Adamski during his visit at a private address in London. Horsley told us he was not impressed by either. He felt that Leslie was “probably sincere but gullible, sucked into the saucer cult by people who hoped to profit from it such as Adamski”, and he warned Browning against having any further contact with them. Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands also met Adamski, who at a press conference in The Hague on 20 May made the bold claim that the British royal family were also keen to meet him and that “Prince Philip so far has been the most interested.”

Peter Horsley’s direct knowledge of the Duke’s interest in UFOs and other strange phenomena ended in 1955 when he left the Palace

to return to RAF duties. But he understood that Prince Philip’s interest continued long after his departure, and stories have emerged that he maintained an active interest in a range of esoteric subjects that he shared with Prince Charles.



During the early 1960s he met the former WWII soldier and Conservative MP David James, who had come to believe in the existence of “an unidentified species in Loch Ness”. James used

his Establishment contacts, including the Royal family, to push for a funded investigation of the Nessie phenomena. He hoped the Duke’s influence with the Royal Navy would secure backing for an expedition on the loch near his second home in the Scottish highlands. In 1964, Prince Philip advised him to take his evidence to the MoD’s Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Solly Zuckerman, who was also Professor of Anatomy at the University of Birmingham. According to the Zuckerman archives at the University of East Anglia, the Professor raised the idea with the Navy’s Chief Scientist, Sir John Carroll, arguing that “if a sonar investigation... were to reveal something extraordinary in the loch, it would be of considerable scientific interest”. But Carroll and Admiralty officials blocked the idea for a “full scale scientific investigation of Loch Ness in search of a monster” on the

LEFT: A 1954 memo from Peter Horsley to Prince Philip. BELOW: Peter Horsley at his Hampshire home in 2000.

grounds of cost.

The Royal fascination for fortune topics also extended to the crop circle phenomenon. One of the leading promoters of the mystery, Colin Andrews, sent a copy of his 1989 book *Circular Evidence*, written with Pat Delgado, to Queen Elizabeth. In August of that year the *Times* revealed that the book had been added to the Royal family’s ‘holiday reading list’ – which had a heavy slant toward Prince Charles’s interest in fringe phenomena. Shortly afterwards, Andrews received a note from Buckingham Palace asking if he would provide updates “on the latest developments on the Circles Phenomenon” for the Duke of Edinburgh, who had become a paid subscriber to his *Crop Circles* newsletter. But the royals turned down Andrews’s offer to provide a personal briefing on the subject, perhaps having learned lessons from the Duke’s earlier flirtation with the UFO contactee movement. No one has been able to establish the depth of the Duke of Edinburgh’s personal interest in UFOs and other strange phenomena as he never mentioned the subject in media interviews. But it is a fact that the Duke accumulated a library of books on the subject; film director John McNeish revealed that he had received an order from Buckingham Palace for a copy of his book *Crop Circle Apocalypse* in 1993.

In 2017 I wrote to Prince Philip to ask if his files on UFOs and crop circles had been preserved in the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle. I said there was considerable public interest in its contents and in particular the private study of the subject, completed on the Duke’s behalf, by Peter Horsley in 1955. On 27 June Prince Philip’s private secretary, Brigadier Archie Miller-Bakewell, responded: “I am afraid that extensive searches have not yielded any papers that would be of help to your research. This letter comes with His Royal Highness’s best wishes.”



## BIG MAN ON TANNA

On the remote island of Tanna, the Duke of Edinburgh's death will be keenly felt – but what comes next for the Philip cult?

Prince Philip, who died on 9 April 2021 two months short of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, was mourned throughout the world, with millions watching his televised funeral on 17 April; but the Duke of Edinburgh's passing will perhaps be most keenly felt on the island of Tanna, part of the Vanuatu archipelago in the Melanesia subregion of Oceania. Vanuatu, an island nation known as *Ripablik blong Vanuatu* locally, was, before its independence in 1980, an Anglo-French colony called the New Hebrides. At some time in the 1950s or 1960s, it is believed that tribesmen living on the tiny volcanic island of Tanna saw a portrait of Prince Philip alongside Queen Elizabeth II, and identified him as the pale-skinned son of a mountain god who, according to local legend, had once ventured far away across the ocean to marry a powerful woman.

When the Queen and Philip paid an official visit to the New Hebrides in 1974, the identification with this deity was solidified when a warrior named Chief Jack Naiva, one of the paddlers of a war canoe that greeted the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, caught sight of Prince Philip standing on the deck in his white uniform. "I knew then that he was the true messiah," said Chief Jack. "From the believers' point of view, he is not English but from their island," explained anthropologist Kirk Huffman. "The original spirit of which he is in the process of recycling is one of their own people. They explain his light skin with a story that says he rolled on a coral reef and it shredded off his black skin and left him white."

Philip was thus regarded by the inhabitants of Tanna as a living god, worshipped as 'The Big Man', to whom villagers prayed daily. They asked his blessing for their



LEFT: Chief Albi, with members of his family, holds a portrait of Prince Philip. BELOW: The photo of Philip with his 'nal nal'.

### *The mourning ceremonies for the Duke are set to last 100 days*



banana and yam crops grown in Tanna's fertile volcanic soil, and they fervently believed that one day he would return to the island and unite the nations of England and Tanna.

The village of Younanen, centre of 'The Prince Philip Movement' is a remote one, over three hours from the island's capital, Lenakel. Largely cut off from the world with limited electronic communications, the islanders only became aware of the Duke of Edinburgh's death on Friday 16 April, the day before Philip's funeral. A worker from a nearby spa resort had made a journey to break the news. One tribeswoman immediately burst into tears, while the men fell silent as they tried to comfort their children. In May 2017, when Philip retired from public duties, villagers hoped the Prince would then have time to visit them. Chief Jack Malia said: "If

he comes one day, the people will not be poor, there will be no sickness, no debt and the garden will be growing very well."

According to prophecy, it had originally been hoped that the Duke of Edinburgh would return to Tanna on 10 June 2010, his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, when, it was thought, he would live alongside villagers in a straw hut, hunting the island's wild pigs and adopting the local traditional dress: for males, a large grass penis sheath. Although the prophecy never came to pass, the tribespeople remained faithful in their support for the entire Royal family. In 2018, to celebrate the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, villagers celebrated with dancing, raising Union flags and slaughtering of what the village chief described as "many, many pigs". The powerful and intoxicating drink kava was also consumed in large quantities. A muddy-looking liquid drunk from coconut shells or plastic bowls, kava is a mixture of water and the crushed roots of the kava plant.

DAN MCGARRY / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES





Drinking it produces a feeling of mild euphoria and drunkenness akin to alcohol. It also numbs the mouth and tongue.

It is thought that much kava will be taken during the mourning ceremonies, set to last 100 days, for the late Duke. “I imagine there will be some ritual wailing, some special dances,” said the Mr Huffman. “There will be a focus on the men drinking kava – it is the key to opening the door to the intangible world. On Tanna it is not drunk as a means of getting drunk. It connects the material world with the non-material world.”

Prince Philip always took the esteem with which he was held by the people of Tanna very seriously. Over the years, he exchanged various gifts with the islanders. Tanna elders once sent him a ‘nal nal’ wooden hunting club, and he in turn sent them back a photograph of himself holding the club. This photograph has become a cherished religious icon on the island.

A delegation of five islanders visited Britain in 2007 hoping for an audience with Philip as part of a Channel 4 documentary called *Meet the Natives*. The filmmakers took the men to stay with the prince’s friend Sir Humphrey Wakefield at Chillingham Castle in Northumberland. Sir Humphrey took the Tanna tribesmen on a hunting trip and invited them to various black-tie dinners. During their visit to the UK, the delegation were invited by Prince Philip to a private reception at Windsor Castle. There was trepidation in anthropological circles that a slip of the tongue by the Duke could shake the religion to its core. But the meeting, if a touch awkward, was hailed as a success. One of the islanders, Jimmy Joseph, said: “Because we believe that he is the son of our god, meeting him is just wonderful.” Once they had returned to Tanna, the delegation relayed the somewhat cryptic message they said they had been given by the Duke of Edinburgh to their chief: “When it is warm, I will send a message. At the moment, it is cold in England.”



ABOVE: The men of Yakel village hold portraits of Prince Philip after hearing of his death.

It is thought that after the 100 days’ mourning for Philip, the villagers of Younanen will deify his son and heir to the throne, Prince Charles. In 2018, Charles visited Vanuatu where he was made an honorary high chief, presented with local gifts and garlands of flowers, and took a sip of specially brewed Royal Kava, last consumed when Prince Philip himself had visited in 1974. The coconut shell from which the Prince of Wales had drunk was taken to Younanen where a shrine was built for it. “So a connection was made between Tanna and Charles,” said Mr Huffman. “I suspect the beliefs of the islanders will continue with Prince Charles.” *D.Telegraph*, 30 April 2010; 9 April 2021; *Independent*, 10 April; *S.Telegraph*, 18 April 2021. See also **FT354:10-11**.

• Matthew Baylis, author of *Man Belong Mrs Queen: Adventures with the Philip Worshippers* (Old Street, 2013), spoke to FT about what he thinks might be next for Tanna’s Philip cult:

“For anthropologists and anyone else who has an interest in cults and religious movements,

this is like one of those eclipses that only happen once every 466 years. We can see what happens when a movement based on belief collides with reality.

“So they’ll be busy debating where to take their long-lived, but frail religion. In my view, they are most likely to seek a relationship with another Royal personage, and that’s most likely to be Prince Charles. I certainly think the whole USP of the Philip movement – what gave it the edge over other competing religions on the island – is it being a relationship with a verifiably alive person. They’re unlikely to say Prince Philip has returned to the island and dwells with them invisibly. That would make their cult on a par with the other big force on the island, the USA-worshipping John Frum, whose shadowy main man has neither delivered on his alleged promises nor shown his face.

“I gather that Siko Nathuan, chief of Yaohnanen – the village at the centre of the cult – is looking to give the job to Prince Charles. That doesn’t mean it will happen. They’re well informed on matters Royal over there: the old Chief, Jack Naiva,

had a kind of Windsor family archive stored inside a biscuit tin in his hut, and he and his fellow villagers questioned me intensely about the various personalities.

“Admiration was expressed for Prince Harry: for the same reasons, I think, that the Duke of Edinburgh once appealed. A man of action – doing something manly in every photo, carrying a gun, riding a horse, always with a cheeky grin. Harry’s marriage to, and production of an heir with, Megan Markle will also be important to them. They believed that the late Duke of Edinburgh, secretly a black man married to a white woman, was using his power and influence to create a world where black and white people became brothers and sisters once more. They saw evidence of that happening whenever they travelled to the capital, Port Vila, where, in contrast to the rigid racist hierarchy of colonial times, people of all colours married and had babies together. How much more fitting could Harry and his new family be?”

For Matthew’s Fortean Traveler account of his time on Tanna, see **FT309:74-76**.





# Haunted pages

ALAN MURDIE ponders the sad, if inevitable, decline of the book-related ghost sighting

"I sat one evening reading when, on looking up from my book, I distinctly saw a school-friend of mine, to whom I was very much attached, standing near the door. I was about to exclaim at the strangeness of her visit, when, to my horror, there were no signs of any one in the room but my mother."

So wrote a Miss Ellen M Greany who, in a letter to the Society for Psychical Research, describing her experience in October 1874 of seeing an apparition, following an appeal for sightings issued in 1884.

A similar story came from a Revd G Tandy. One evening he was examining a book by candlelight at his home in Loweswater, Cumbria. He recalled how he "found the passage I wanted, when, happening to look towards the window, which was opposite to the bookcase, I saw the face of an old friend whom I had known well at Cambridge." He saw the face "as clearly and distinctly, ghastly pale, but with the features so marked and so distinct" that he immediately recognising it as that of a Canon Robinson "my most dear and intimate friend... whom I had not seen for many years past (ten or eleven at the very least)."

Convinced his old friend had descended on him at his rather remote village, the Reverend Tandy rushed to the door and called out. There was no reply. A diligent search found no one. (*Proceedings of the SPR*, vol.v, p.409).

For anyone versed in such apparitional stories of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sequels to both these stories are predictable, among hundreds that were collected.

Miss Greany recalled after enduring mild



**"It is most interesting to notice how often an apparition appeared when the percipient was reading"**

mockery and accusations by her mother, "suggesting I had read too much or been dreaming" that "a day or so after this event, I had news to say my friend was no more."

This friend had died the same evening, "about the same time that I saw her vision".

The Revd Tandy learned of the fate of his friend even more quickly. Puzzled by failing to find Canon Robinson, he returned indoors, and took the wrapper off a newspaper he had been given earlier that day by a neighbour and left unread. Casually opening it, the first news item he saw was an announcement of the death of the same Canon Robinson.

Such 'crisis apparitions' were once rather common, all sharing the feature of being seen close to the death of the person perceived. By 1886 the SPR had gathered enough to fill its *Phantasms of the Living*, vols.1&2. When researcher Andrew MacKenzie (1911-2001) re-examined these cases in the 1970s, he identified another characteristic: "Time and again I have been struck by the fact that people have been reading – 'lost in a book' is a very telling phrase – when they looked up to see an apparition".

Originally from New Zealand, Mackenzie conducted in-depth studies of British and other European ghost reports over many years, attempting to identify common patterns. In his book *Hauntings and Apparitions* (1982) he stated: "It is most interesting, when reading through the Society's publications with care, to notice how often an apparition appeared when the percipient was reading."

I rather think Mackenzie was on to something. Reading an actual hard-copy book, and enjoying 'being lost in a book' is one that has the capacity to expand your inner mental world. Then in the shift from a





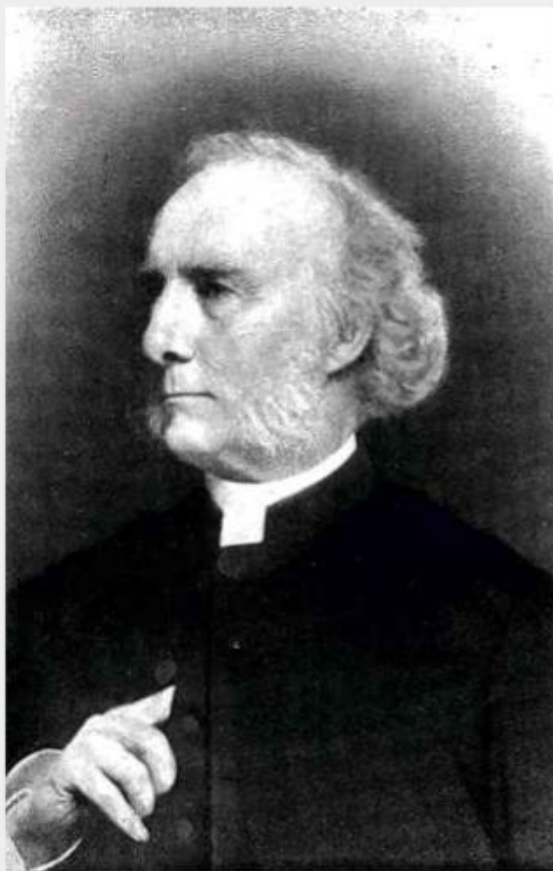
**ABOVE:** Mannington Hall at Saxthorpe, Norfolk, where Dr Augustus Jessop of Scarning, Norfolk, had his classic book-related ghostly experience. **BELOW:** Jessop, a friend of MR James, was described by one of James's biographers as "a fine specimen of the learned but somewhat eccentric country parson."

private mode of consciousness back into a widening awareness comes a point where an apparition can become perceptible. It might appear that as your attention crosses the boundary from inner reality back into the objective, material world you may also be afforded a glimpse into another world or dimension.

In many ways the classic Victorian example of a book-related sighting (although it did not involve a person recently deceased) is the experience related by Dr Augustus Jessop (1823-1914), a clergyman. This occurred at Mannington Hall at Saxthorpe, Norfolk, late on the night of 10 October 1879.

Jessop was an example of the now near-extinct breed of lettered country parson enjoying scholarly interests which extended far beyond his own parish boundaries at Scarning, near Norwich. Invited to Mannington Hall by its owner Lord Orford, Jessop was alone in the library examining rare books concerning Henry Walpole, a Catholic martyr who was hanged, drawn and quartered as a punishment for alleged treason in 1595.

After enjoying a fine dinner arranged by his host, Jessop was given the run of Lord Orford's library, supplied with water and a decanter of brandy as refreshment. Jessop must have been in a good mood, enjoying a sense of anticipation and excitement at



the treasures he might be able ferret out among the pages of the rare volumes.

Such pleasures may be difficult for many non-readers to comprehend today. It is a delight still shared by such eccentrics as committed fortean researchers, academic specialists and devoted bibliophiles. Visiting a long-established library, such as

those of the older British universities or the Inns of Court in London, may evoke mixed sensations of awe, delight and a reproachful fascination at the thousands of volumes displayed, many of which one will never have time to read.

Inside the library Jessop discovered six antique volumes he needed to consult, taking them into a connecting room "furnished with every luxury". Seated at a desk by the fire, he began copying passages from them by the light of candles set in four silver candlesticks. Recalling his experience, Jessop stated:

"I had been engaged upon it for half an hour and was just beginning to think that my work was drawing to a close, when, as I was actually writing, I saw a large white hand within a foot of my elbow."

Looking round he saw "a figure of a somewhat large man, with his back to the fire, bending slightly over the table, apparently examining the pile of books that I had been at work upon. The man's face was turned away from me, but I saw his closely cut reddish brown hair, his ear, his shaved cheek, the eyebrow, the corner of his right eye, the side of the forehead, and the large high cheekbone.

"The figure was clad in what I can only describe as a kind of ecclesiastical habit of thick-corded silk, or some such material, close up to the throat, and a narrow rim





# GHOSTWATCH

or edging, of about an inch broad, of satin or velvet serving as a stand-up collar, and fitting close to the chin.”

The figure was so clear even the blue veins of its right hand were visible, reminding Jessop of the painted hand of “Velasquez’s magnificent ‘Dead Knight,’ in the National Gallery”.

Satisfied that he was awake, Jessop felt no alarm at the spectre, stating: “I was fascinated; *afraid not of his staying but lest he should go.*”

Observing in awe, Jessop even wondered whether he should attempt sketching his mysterious visitor. Then, upon reaching out to one of the books, his arm momentarily obscured his view of the figure and it vanished. Jessop continued writing for five minutes and was nearly finished when the figure re-appeared in the same position.

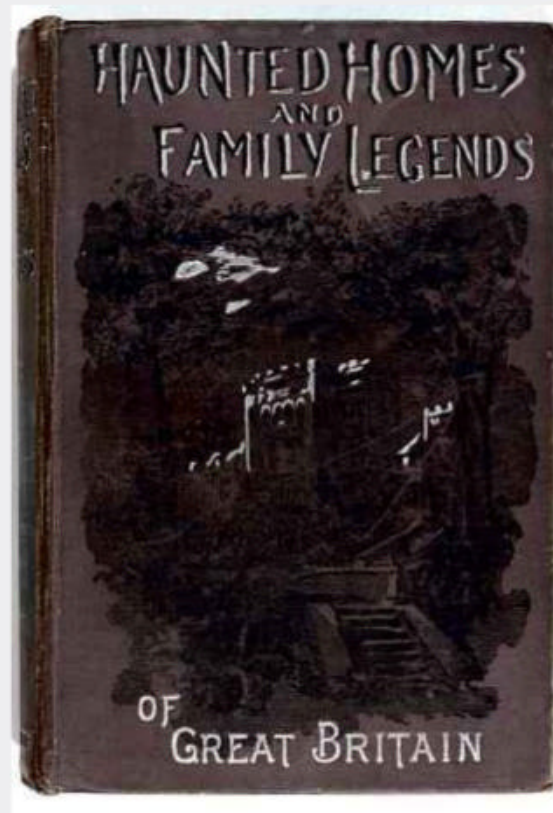
Most remarkably, the erudite doctor found himself wholly unable to speak. With remarkable calmness he maintained his studious copying from the book, kept silent company by the mysterious visitor. Completing his task, he shut the book and moved it, whereupon the figure vanished. Unperturbed, Jessop retired to bed and slept well.

He published his vivid encounter in the *Athenæum* magazine for January 1880. It caused a minor sensation, eventually becoming “the most famous Norfolk ghost story” after the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall (see Enid Porter in *The Folklore of East Anglia*, 1974) following its inclusion among the ‘strange stories’ gathered up by John Ingram for his late Victorian classic *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* (1884).

Jessop could offer no explanation himself as to the identity of his visitor, whom he referred to as ‘my friend’. There was no sequel or discovery of any significant fact and no other sightings were reported from Mannington Hall. In many ways, Jessop’s apparition resembles later 20<sup>th</sup> century accounts, in being unidentified and seemingly meaningless and uncommunicative, though visible for much longer than your average modern ghost sighting.

From a spiritual perspective (and if taking a traditional Roman Catholic position) the appearance might be interpreted as a manifestation by the spirit of the martyred Henry Walpole himself to the Anglican Jessop. (See *Shane Leslie’s Ghost Book* (1955) by Shane Leslie; ‘Augustus Jessop and the ghost of Henry Walpole SJ’ by TB Trappes-Lomax in *British Catholic History* vol.7 issue.3, 1963 145).

Alternatively, the simplest explanation would be that Jessop merely nodded off and dreamed everything. The brandy decanter might be implicated, though contrary to



## Could the spectre be explained by Jessop suffering a temporal lobe episode?

popular belief ordinary drunkenness does not normally cause hallucinations. Perhaps anticipating this objection, Jessop ensured that his account mentions his being wide awake and only refreshing himself with seltzer water, also adding his handwriting showed no trace of shaking or nervousness, even in the presence of the apparition.

Another naturalistic explanation would be that Jessop, while awake, somehow

**LEFT:** Could Jessop’s visitor have been the ghost of the martyred Henry Walpole? **BELOW LEFT:** Jessop’s story was included by John Ingram in his oft-reprinted *Haunted Homes* collection.

imagined it all, conjuring the spirit from the contents of his own brain. Unfortunately, things are not quite so simple. Blaming imagination in fact proves a key, not to answers but multiple possibilities.

Could Jessop have hypnotised himself, becoming so absorbed that he spontaneously created a mental image? Some exceptional individuals can be so overcome by literary suggestions they hallucinate, like a child suffering night terrors from too many scary stories before bedtime. In 1911, the SPR recorded a case where a casual phrase in a book brought about a fully-fledged apparition with an adult, a sensitive gentleman named Grunbaum. He had accidentally come across a passage in an old book on Faust setting out a magic formula, “Tetra-agrammation-Adonai-Agla.” Later, while lying in bed, these words flashed through his mind and shortly afterwards he was alarmed by a horrifying Mephistophelian phantom appearing at the end of the bed, a broad figure with vibrating smoky-blue outlines. (In ‘Pseudo-Physical Phenomena in the Case of Mr Grunbaum’ by Alice Johnson *Proceedings of the SPR* (1911) vol XXVII, 400). It seems probable the hallucination was triggered by the magical conjuration occurring in a hypnagogic or half-awake state, arising from what Freud once called the mind’s ‘private theatre’.

Alternatively, could the spectre be explained through Jessop suffering a temporal lobe episode, resulting in a moment of bodily misperception or ‘autoscopy’ involving seeing oneself? Ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) was most interested in this phenomenon, having once experienced a mild hallucination himself as a child. While at a school desk he became aware of a strange hand next to him writing, an apparent double of his own right hand. Jessop’s form seemed similarly engaged as himself, leaning over the desk and examining a book.

Or, if exploring the outer limits of hallucinatory hypotheses, how about a ‘fungal hallucination’? This originates from a 1995 proposal in the *Lancet* by Dr RJ Hay, one of the UK’s leading mycologists and dermatologists who considered “The source of inspiration for many great literary figures may have been nothing more than a quick sniff of the bouquet of mouldy books”. This was rejected by the British Library, which declared there were no recorded cases of its readers complaining of hallucinatory symptoms, despite extensive use of old books sometimes affected by mildew or



mould. “It sounds fascinating, but it’s the first we’ve heard of it.” (*Guardian*, 15 Dec 1995). From Hay’s “enhancement of enlightenment” it was the merest step to postulating it as a cause of seeing ghosts in libraries (noted in *A Natural History of Ghosts*, 2012, by Roger Clarke).

For a purely physical explanation of Jessop’s sighting, the obvious choice is Jessop mistaking a live member of the household as a ghost. This surfaced 75 years later after James Wentworth Day retold the story in *Here are Ghosts and Witches* (1954). The then Lord

Orford contacted Day in 1956 to share a family tradition that averred the supposed ghost was a flesh-and-blood visitor, an Italian servant named Carlo. The source was a letter in the family archive written by a Colonel Purdy, who learned the truth ‘many years later’ from a George Davison, a former manservant who had worked at the hall in 1879. Davison confided that Carlo was partial to a nightcap and slipped into the library aiming to snatch the brandy flask from the dozing Jessop. Despite the hearsay character of this claim, Lord Orford expressed having “no doubt it was the true explanation’. (See *In Search of Ghosts*, 1969, by James Wentworth Day).

Regrettably, vivid sightings like Jessop’s have dwindled since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and markedly so with crisis apparitions. Dr Ian Stevenson commented upon this change in his 1989 Presidential address to the SPR. Stevenson suggested the ease of modern communications and differing patterns of death and dying might have changed things (In ‘Thoughts on the Decline of Major Paranormal Phenomena’ *Proceedings* (1990) vol.57, part 215). This also followed analysis by a member, Dr Peter Hallson, comparing reports of apparitions a century apart. In 1884 some 16 of 26 cases involved paranormal communication during a crisis in a person’s life with a relative or friend. In contrast, not a single case of this type was submitted in 1984 to the SPR, or had been for some years.

More specifically, I wonder whether there is in some way a causal link between



**LEFT:** Jeff Bezos – evidently no friend to ghosts – tries to convince readers they should ditch their books for the latest Kindle.

increasingly rare commodity thanks to the wholly different media environment in which people are immersed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

Among many warnings about the possible effects of this nearly 70 years ago was Ray Bradbury in his dystopian novella *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) amid contemporary concerns over brainwashing and subliminal influence (e.g., *Battle for the Mind* (1957) by William

Sargent and *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) by Vance Packard). Bradbury was concerned by the numbing effect of consuming endless television broadcasts, fearing it would lead to a society of desensitised and passive viewers content to sit back and be reflexively shocked, titillated, outraged, amused and enraged as dictated entirely by broadcasters, rather than think creatively for themselves.

Admittedly, Covid-19 lockdowns and enforced isolation may have resulted in a temporary rediscovery of the pleasures of reading books for some, but otherwise Bradbury’s entertainment-addicted community of docile viewers choosing only to watch screens may be considered as having arrived. The difference is they have binned their books voluntarily rather than having them seized and burned by a censorious state.

Of course, seeing a ghost, like having a dream, does not depend upon being able to read, since apparitions appeared in pre-literate societies and are witnessed by young children, illiterates and possibly by domestic animals (at least the higher mammals). But via screens today, even the poorest householders experience an unending flow of glowing electronic imagery and entertainment far exceeding the spectacles available to Roman emperors and mediæval monarchs, all accessible by pressing a button or clicking a mouse. Against this, the humble and insubstantial ghost may struggle in vain ever to be perceivable at all.

the decline in sightings and the rise of modern televisual media. The reduction in reported apparitions has coincided with the expansion in TV viewing over the decades and, since the 1990s, the on-line absorption of images, via the Internet, smart phones and electronic games. These days, people seem more prone to reporting anomalous images captured on mobile phones and digital cameras rather than announcing any direct observation of a ghost, apparently with their own eyes.

My guess is that perhaps a change in reading habits over the years might also contribute to this. Those who still cherish the experience of actually reading a book in preference to absorbing text from screen displays are a dwindling minority. Relatively few people today possess personal libraries that can provide (as with Prospero in *The Tempest*) a ‘dukedom large enough’. For generations now, books have been disappearing from homes and replaced with ready-constructed imagery beamed and directed into our consciousness, via screens perhaps undermining our own inner capacities for imaginative visualisation as a creative mental process. Has the corresponding spread of visual images across culture affected human consciousness on a subliminal level, reducing the human capacity for visualisation and shrinking our ability to form or directly perceive ghostly forms as a lived experience?

Genuine reading also demands complete silence for full absorption, again an





## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Yet more monoliths, a new Dyatlov Pass scare and a concrete miracle in Mexico City



ABOVE: Soldiers stand guard near a monolith that appeared at the ancient site of Göbekli Tepe in Sanliurfa, Turkey.

### MORE MONOLITH MADNESS [FT401:4; 402:24]



A 10ft (3m) tall metal slab has been found near Göbekli Tepe in Turkey's southeastern province of Sanliurfa. It's yet another example of the monolith craze that began in November 2020 when an object similar to that seen in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* was found in a Utah desert. Since then, monoliths have been springing up like mushrooms across the globe. This latest slab is notable for its location: Göbekli Tepe is the world's oldest temple site, whose huge megaliths feature carvings of animals and birds. The temple (if indeed it had a religious or ceremonial function, something that is by no means certain) has been dated to the 10th–8th millennium BC, placing it prior to the development of agriculture and permanent human settlements.

Turkish security forces rushed to the area after local villagers alerted them to the monolith, much smaller than its numerous counterparts found elsewhere. Troops cordoned off the area, and specialists were brought in to examine the edifice. The slab, a mere 45cm (18in) wide, bore an inscription in the ancient Göktürk alphabet and was translated as: "Look at the sky if you want to see the Moon". Turkish officials have launched an investigation to establish who installed the metal slab. Four days later, the monolith disappeared overnight; it was not clear whether it had been taken away by the authorities or removed by persons unknown.

Other monoliths continued to appear in various parts of the world in late 2020 and early 2021. In the Netherlands, villagers in the Frisian village of Oudehorne woke one morning to discover a silver metal slab roughly twice human height, standing on the edge of a pool of water. Later in December,

San Francisco's residents were delighted and bemused to find a gingerbread monolith on a promontory in the city's Corona Heights Park. Approximately 8ft (2.5m) tall, its gingerbread bricks were held together by icing, with a few gumdrop rivets. That same month, an elegant, tall, thin mirrored structure appeared on the Isle of Wight's Compton Beach. Alexia Fishwick, a local resident said she "was dumbstruck" after coming across the mystery object during a beach walk. She described it as "really quite magical". *BBC News*, 7, 26 Dec 2020; *dailysabah.com*, 5 Feb; [AP] 9 Feb 2021.

### DYATLOV PASS REVISITED [FT377:4, 403:4]



Less than a fortnight after the publication of a new theory proposing an explanation for the Dyatlov Pass enigma and the mysterious deaths of nine hikers, a group of eight tourists

from Moscow went missing – in Dyatlov Pass. The group had journeyed to this remote area of the Ural Mountains to pay tribute to the nine explorers killed in 1959. They were expected to return to their base by the morning of 10 February, but hadn't made contact by the scheduled time. "They were supposed to leave at eight o'clock this morning," said a source, "but they have not returned yet and there is no contact with them."

Twelve hours after their scheduled return time, the group turned up at a nearby airport, apparently unscathed, and acknowledging that their failure to make contact had "sparked a little panic". Explaining why their journey had gone so wrong, one of the tourists said that "many negative factors developed in one day," specifically, unpredictable weather combined with the lack of a clear path. Eventually, he said, the group had wound up stuck on a frozen lake. Their lack of communication with relatives back home was due to their portable satellite dish being broken. "That is why they lost us," explained the unfortunate traveller.

The new study into the original 1959 mystery, published by two Swiss researchers in the scientific journal *Communications: Earth & Environment* proposes that the nine fatalities were due to a snow avalanche, that the extreme pressure of the snowfall could have caused the catastrophic head and chest injuries sustained by several of the group, and that missing eyes, tongue and eyebrows observed on some of the bodies could have been the result of scavenging animals. The first investigation, by Soviet authorities in 1959, ruled that an "unknown natural force" had been the cause of the deaths. One of the recent study's authors has said he fears their explanation is too straightforward to be





publicly accepted. “People don’t want it to be an avalanche,” he said. “It’s too normal.” Others have argued that the study does not address all the anomalies associated with this strange event. *newsweek.com*, 10 Feb 2021.

## ACCIDENTAL LOCKDOWN [FT400:29]



The Cellmate Chastity Cage, a new hi-tech sex toy, was recently subject to an alert after cyber-

security experts warned that the Internet-based device was vulnerable to hackers. A security flaw had been discovered that meant it would be possible for a hacker to lock all the Cellmates currently in use, against their wearers’ wishes. The metal clamp element of the gadget has no manual override, so wearers would have needed to free themselves by means of a grinder or a bolt cutter. Any other attempts to cut through the plastic housing would risk injury to some of the male body’s most vulnerable areas.

Qiui, the China-based manufacturer of the “innovative sex toy”, assured customers that the bug had been fixed and that the Cellmate was no longer vulnerable to cyber-attack. It would seem, though, that at least one wearer of the device was subject to a ransom demand when a hacker locked his Cellmate and sent him the ominous message: “Your Cock Is Mine Now”. One potential victim, identified only as ‘Robert’, was required to make a payment of 0.02 Bitcoin (currently around £650) in order that the device be unlocked. ‘Robert’ said his Cellmate was definitely “locked” and that he “could not gain access to it,” but “fortunately I didn’t have this locked on myself while this happened.” A security researcher, speaking to members of the BDSM community last October, learned that several other men had been threatened. Another man who received an extortion



ABOVE: Dull men (and even some dull women) feature in the new Dull Men’s Club calendar. BELOW: Our Lady of the Pothole appeared in Mexico City last December.

message said that, luckily for him, “I wasn’t the owner of the cage anymore” – although presumably this turned out to be unlucky for someone else. Manufacturers Qiui did not respond to a request for comment. *vice.com*, 11 Jan 2021.

## DULL MEN’S CLUB [FT339:8-9]



The Dull Men’s Club calendar for 2021 is now available from Amazon. The club – which has included women since 2017 – has more than 50,000 members, passionate about mundane things. This year’s calendar features James Folta from New York, who loves the different colours and motifs of the graphic patterns on the inside of security envelopes. Then there’s Martin Evans from west Wales, who in 1997 founded the Telegraph Pole Appreciation Society, which now has more than 1,000 members. He said: “We appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the poles and their place in our landscape.” January’s entry was vintage washing machine restorer Lee Maxwell, 90, who has more than 1,100 on display in his museum in Colorado. April is marked by Chris Cole from Devon, who has completed more than 7,000 jigsaws over the past 20 years. He spends 10 hours a day on his obsession. Design student Elena

Kamas from Stanford University appears for photographing more than 150 “wet floor” signs. Still, dull men seem to outnumber their female counterparts. *Sun*, 18 Dec 2020. For more on dull chic, see FT74:18, 137:23. For further eccentric collectors, see FT265:18-19, 268:22, 277:24-25, 279:22.

## ANOTHER WOMB RAIDER [FT403:16]



Flavia Godinho Mafra, 24, was discovered dead with her unborn baby girl cut out of her womb. The supply teacher was 36 weeks pregnant when her husband and mother found her body in a disused pottery yard in Canelinha, a town in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. She had been lured to a fake baby shower by an old school friend, whose partner admitted using a brick to kill her. Police later discovered that the child had been taken to hospital by the couple, who were both arrested. The school friend confessed to having developed a fixation with stealing a child after she suffered a miscarriage in January. At the time of the report, the baby was in

the Children’s Hospital of Florianopolis, where she had been given antibiotics and pain medication, but was in good health. *Metro*, 4 Sept 2020.

Womb raider Lisa Montgomery was executed in January [FT403:16]. For our most recent round-up of cases, see FT384:22-23. *Fortean Times* has reported 25 of these grisly crimes, 16 in the US, four in Brazil, two in Mexico, two in South Africa, and one each in Colombia and Hong Kong. None in Europe; and why the US leads the field is a mystery.

## IMAGE OF OUR LADY [FT298:6-7]



At the start of December 2020, workers showed up to repair a pothole with concrete in the Benito Juárez area of Nezahualcóyotl City in Mexico, but traffic caused the hole to reopen. Workers came back to repair it again just before 12 December, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. “That is when a miraculous image of the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared in the fresh concrete,” Beatriz Noriega Ramirez told reporters. “As soon as we saw it, a group of neighbours helped me to tape off the site of the pothole, and surround it with candles and flowers as a tribute to Our Lady.” News of the miracle quickly spread, and people came to marvel and pray. “Sick people have been driven here, and have asked from their cars to be healed,” said Ms Ramirez. *Mexico Daily News*, 14 Dec 2020.







## MEDICAL BAG

This month's casebook focuses on two medical mysteries: how can light cause sneezing, and what is making black bears behave more like dogs?



**ABOVE LEFT:** The Oxford Photic Sneeze Survey is trying to understand how bright light can trigger sneezing in some individuals. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Young black bears in the United States are wandering into human environments and displaying lack of fear and increased curiosity due to an unidentified neurological disease.

### THE MYSTERY OF PHOTOSNEEZIA

Scientists are attempting to unpick the mystery of the “photic sneeze” – a bizarre reflex that causes people to sternutate, or sneeze, in response to bright light. Also known as “photosneeziya”, the phenomenon is thought to affect about a quarter of the UK population, but the mechanism that triggers it is unknown. “It is typically preceded by a tickling sensation, and the sneeze is not immediate. It will take a few seconds,” said Manuel Spitschan, an experimental psychologist at the University of Oxford, who has launched a study. “It also appears that spending some time in darkness prior to the light exposure is necessary.” A particular trigger is stepping from a dark building into the bright outdoors.

In his *Book of Problems*, Aristotle pondered: Why does the heat of the Sun provoke sneezing? His hypothesis was that sweat in the nose triggered it, but Francis Bacon disproved this theory by facing the Sun with his eyes closed and finding that it didn't make him sneeze. His theory was that the Sun's light made the eyes water, causing moisture to trickle down the nose, initiating a sneeze.

Various modern theories have been proposed, but none is easily testable. Sneezes are thought to occur when the layer of cells lining the nose becomes irritated. This triggers the trigeminal nerve, which carries sensory information from the face to the brain, to initiate the sneeze reflex, expelling the offending irritant at speeds of up to 150km/h (93mph). One theory is that the trigeminal nerve can occasionally become cross-activated by signals from the optic nerve, which connects eye to brain, so that bright light hitting the back of the eye may also initiate a sneeze.

Another theory is that optic nerve fibres could accidentally activate neighbouring nerve fibres as they converge in the brain. Curiously, the reflex can also be triggered during eye surgery, meaning needle-bearing anaesthetists must be alert to nascent sneezes to avoid damage. The condition is thought to be heritable, so if one of your parents has it the chances are you will too.

A related condition called gustatory rhinitis can prompt certain individuals to sneeze after eating, particularly spicy foods, although the mechanisms for this too remain a mystery.

The goal of the Oxford Photic Sneeze Survey, coordinated

### “Infected bears approach people in a peaceful and friendly manner”

by Spitschan, is to better understand what drives the reflex, and maybe find the ideal stimulus. After completing a questionnaire, volunteers are shown different light sources. “We know it's only bright light that triggers it, but wavelength might also be a factor,” said Spitschan. “Once we know that, we can start to unpick the retinal mechanism, so is it going through the rods or cones or something else?” He is also curious to investigate whether people's chronotype, their preference for mornings or evenings, influences their propensity to photosneeziya. *Guardian, 12 Oct 2020.*

### BEARS TURN INTO ‘FRIENDLY DOGS’

Young Californian bears are becoming dangerously friendly due to a mysterious neurological disease. The brain infection affecting Californian black bears (*Ursus americanus*) causes them to behave like

pets, approaching humans without fear, seemingly curious and playful. In March 2018 a young female bear walked into a school classroom where she sat down among the children. And in 2019, another infected bear was caught on video trying to climb onto a snowboard, alongside its rider. This young male was eventually rescued after the snowboarder and his friends played with him and fed him sandwiches.

Ann Bryant, executive director of the BEAR (Bear Education Aversion Response) League has been involved in bear rescue. “Infected bears come to our attention because they approach people in a peaceful, friendly and non-aggressive manner,” she explained. “Their behaviour is similar to a dog, not a bear.” Ms Bryant cautions against human interaction with these large, powerful mammals. “Bears approaching people who might then treat the animal as if they are tame could easily present a danger,” she said.

The bears, all around one year old, appear to be suffering from a form of infectious encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain tissue that can be caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites. It may also be part of an autoimmune





response. Symptoms include a prominent head tilt, lethargic movements, muscle tremors, seizures, walking in circles and being significantly underweight, as well as this uncharacteristic fearlessness towards humans. Veterinarians are currently unsure as to what is causing the problem, or how fast it is spreading among the population. Four individuals were found with the disease in 2020, the highest number of cases since it was first recorded in 2014. This was in Nevada, when veterinarians detected an infection in bears seen around Lake Tahoe. Because the black bear population in California has increased from between 10,000 and 15,000 individuals in 1982 to between 30,000 and 40,000 in 2020, vets aren't too worried about the impacts of the disease on the overall population.

The most recent case of a bear with a brain infection was discovered in February 2021, lying in the back of a truck parked on a residential property, severely underweight and covered in fleas. The bear had to be put down because of its poor physical condition, and its fate is typical of the majority of infected bears, unable to take care of themselves and apparently having been abandoned by their mothers. Infected bears are unlikely to be able to fully develop into self-dependent adults.

Five new viruses in black bears have been identified, any one of which may be the cause of the encephalitis, but none has yet been confirmed. A research lab is also investigating whether a protozoan parasite is involved, but scientists acknowledge there could be more than one pathogen responsible. Although they do not believe the disease to be transmissible between individual bears, scientists are concerned since the cause of the infection is unknown. "The worst part about this threat to our bears is that we don't know for sure what causes it," said Ms Bryant. "The unknown is troubling." *livescience.com*, 2 Apr 2021.



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### CHILDHOOD'S END

Jane is 10 years old. She is a well-balanced introverted child. I've known her for most of her life.

From about the age of five, Jane heard a disembodied feminine voice "half creepy, half sweet". The voice would say her name. She only heard it when she was alone. She heard it typically in the woods or in her bed. The voice has practically disappeared now. From about seven or eight she began to see what she calls "tree shadows" (her term). They are usually black (but sometimes white) and lack eyes or ears or fingers on their hands. Occasionally they take on the form of cats. They go through trees "and do not come out the other side". She sees them maybe once or twice a month, again only when she is alone and only in the woods. She sees them less and less often.

When I asked her whether the voice and the tree shadows are the same thing, she thinks not. Both are "not nice but they are not evil. They are between, but they don't mean any harm." Her mother, a Catholic, who is very relaxed about these experiences, suggested to her daughter that perhaps they were the spirits of dead family members. Jane is unsure.

I make no comment, but in most of European history these experiences would

have been assimilated to fairylore, of which Jane has very little knowledge. Jane has talked about tree shadows for the past couple of years and she has slowly come to realise that these are not normal experiences.

"I used to think everyone saw them."

The conversation is low key, but I notice, unlike the Easter before, when her mother

brought up the subject, that Jane is rather proud of her encounters in the wood. They are part of who she is and what sets her apart. In two years, I doubt she'll see them; and in five years, with lipstick on her desk, posters of boy bands on the wall, and two hours of homework a night, I wonder if she'll even remember the figures among the trees. Puff the Magic Dragon will no longer feature in Jane's social calendar...

Sometimes when I get persecutory supernatural accounts from adults I worry

about the subject's mental wellbeing, especially when the encounters are habitual. With the accounts I have got from children – admittedly many grown children, remembering their infancy – I almost never have that concern.

Jane seems relaxed about this fading part of her childhood. But what is it that opens certain children to these kinds of experiences and why do they fade so dramatically towards puberty?

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

JANE IS RATHER PROUD OF HER ENCOUNTERS. THEY ARE PART OF WHO SHE IS AND WHAT SETS HER APART.





## A pandemic of UFOs

**NIGEL WATSON** surveys the latest sightings and ufological news from around the world

### PYRAMID SCHEMING

Filmmaker Jeremy Corbell released leaked footage, to an eager media reception, of a pyramid shaped UFO along with faint orbs, filmed from the *USS Russell* during July 2019, and images of a spherical craft descending into the sea captured by the *USS Omaha*. These and iPhone pictures taken of three types of UAP by an FA-18 pilot flying out of Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia on 4 March 2019 were the subject of a number of intelligence briefings.

Jeremy thinks these releases will lead to a “unique moment in modern history” that will revolutionise our view of the UFO phenomenon. Others say the ‘pyramid’ footage is a combination of camera artefacts and out-of-focus stars and an aircraft, while the FA-18 pictures are of an out-of-focus (again!) solar balloon. Beside the ET believers, there are others that think they are enemy drones and balloons sent “to stimulate America’s most capable air defense systems and collect extremely high-quality electronic intelligence data on them.” (For more, see David Clarke’s article on pp38-43 this issue.)

The Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (UAPTF) was established on 4 August 2020. Led by the US Navy, its mission is to “detect, analyze and catalog UAPs that could potentially pose a threat to US national security”. This seems to be more due to the threat of unmanned military aircraft rather than extraterrestrials. In line with such fears, on 26 April 2021, the US scheduled a manned/unmanned exercise, using drones, swarms of drones, pilotless aircraft and ships, to test their direct attack and electronic warfare capabilities.

UAPTF is investigating the images, which have been confirmed to be genuine, but the poor quality of these and other previously leaked images only shows that ET supporters will grasp at any straw to believe that disclosure is on the horizon.

This uncertainty, according to Mark Pilkington, author of the book *Mirage Men*, is better “than to admit either that: a) highly-trained pilots are misidentifying mundane objects or friendly military tech as something else; b) they’re being tested or experimented on with friendly advanced and secret technology/craft or c) rival nations are toying with them during their exercises. This is classic *Mirage Men* strategy: keep the UFOs flying and (almost) everyone benefits.” [www.extraordinarybeliefs.com/news4/navy-filmed-pyramid-ufos](http://www.extraordinarybeliefs.com/news4/navy-filmed-pyramid-ufos); [www.uapmedia.uk/articles/drone-swarms-uaps-or-other-actors](http://www.uapmedia.uk/articles/drone-swarms-uaps-or-other-actors); [www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40054/](http://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40054/)



*adversary-drones-are-spying-on-the-u-s-and-the-pentagon-acts-like-theyre-ufos?; www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2314065/establishment-of-unidentified-aerial-phenomena-task-force/; www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40262/huge-navy-unmanned-focused-experiment-underway-featuring-live-missile-shoot-and-super-swarms.*

### UFO SIGHTINGS UP

Canadian UFO researcher Chris Rutkowski’s annual review of UFO statistics for his country show that there was a 46% rise in sightings last year. 30% of the 1,243 reports were from Ontario, and 24% from Quebec. 13% remain unexplained, including a pie-shaped object seen over a road in Alberta, and a one-metre diameter object that passed close to an aircraft travelling over Thunder Bay, Ontario. Chris thinks the increase was due to public interest sparked by the release of UAP videos by the US Navy and that during the pandemic people have had more time to look at the sky. See: [survey.canadianuforeport.com](http://survey.canadianuforeport.com)

According to the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC), there was an increase of some 1,000 sightings in the USA during 2020, reaching a peak of 7,200 reports. Again, this increase has been attributed to greater interest, and time available to people during the pandemic, and not to a renewed alien interest in our planet.

The British UFO Research Association (BUFORA) received 583 reports during 2020, a few more than the 484 collected by the North West UFO Research and Investigation Group (NWUFORIG) reported last issue (**FT405:28**). The number of reports was 40% less than the previous year, but significantly they received twice the number of high strangeness reports (37). Their overview of

LEFT: An image from the footage leaked by Jeremy Corbell – UAP, orb or camera artefact?

2020 claims this is due to greater tension caused by the pandemic and that people are yearning for salvation from the stars. [survey.canadianuforeport.com](http://survey.canadianuforeport.com); [www.nuforc.org/index.html](http://www.nuforc.org/index.html); [bufora.org.uk/documents/TheFutureofUfologyin2021.pdf](http://bufora.org.uk/documents/TheFutureofUfologyin2021.pdf)

### ANAMNESIS PROTOCOL APPEAL

Tony Eccles, a BUFORA member based in Exeter, is keen to continue Ken Phillips and Dr Alex Keul’s Anamnesis Protocol (life memory) research by obtaining data to see if it tallies with their first results, and also what it might tell us about Close Encounter percipients. He is principally looking at the UFO as an agent of change (whether this is due to internal or external stimuli). He notes: “Outside specific researcher-based belief systems there are very few witness studies which offer us different insights into such profound experiences. One close encounter case I was involved in (known publicly as the Robert Shawe case) involved missing time and, frustratingly, hypnotic regression. Fortunately, this witness thought the regression was fruitless and that the UFO sighting was meant for him. He did a couple of drawings: the first of typical greys, which he threw away, and the second of an organic column, the shape the descending lights took, which he described as majestic. He himself ruled out the alien abduction as an explanation and a recent conversation revealed that the UFO helped return him to his Christian faith! The UFO experience brought about important change for him.” Tony would like to hear from CE 1, 2 or 3 experiencers or from researchers who have relevant information. Email: [curator33@hotmail.com](mailto:curator33@hotmail.com)

### PELICAN SPOTTED

Notable Pelicanist John Rimmer is profiled in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, where he states that the Magonian approach is to look at how phenomena like UFOs or bedroom visitors are “common across all cultures but interpreted in different ways”. He points out that social media spreads information quicker but it does not generate new ideas – it simply repeats the same things we were saying 30 years ago. Confirming John’s statement, exactly 30 years ago I wrote: “UFOs are never seen in a cultural vacuum” for *Magonia* magazine. [skepticalinquirer.org/exclusive/a-flight-of-pelicans-john-rimmer](http://skepticalinquirer.org/exclusive/a-flight-of-pelicans-john-rimmer); [magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/11/seeing-things.html#more](http://magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/11/seeing-things.html#more)





# Goggleboxing

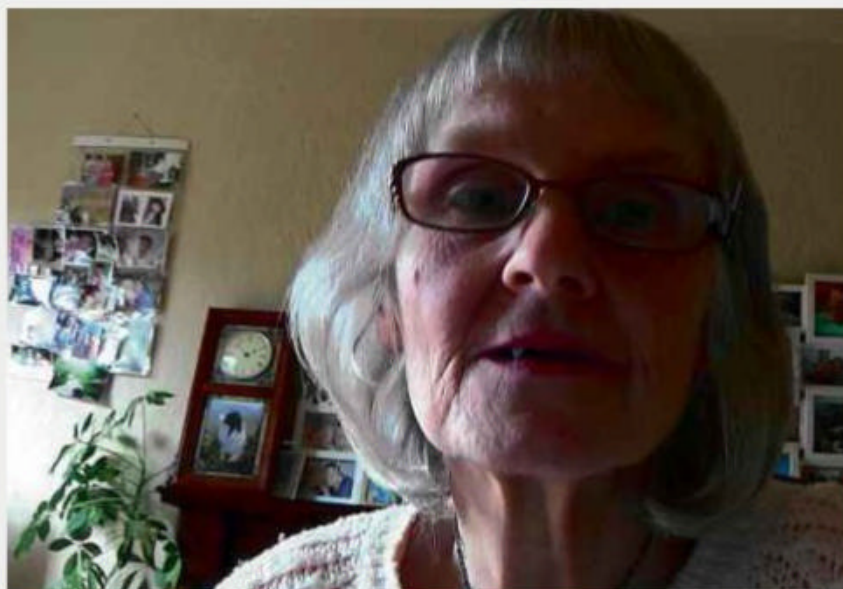
JENNY RANGLES does a TV interview in a pandemic and ponders the virtual possibilities for ufology

TV interviews do not often end well, so as a rule I avoid them. Recently, though, I was offered an opportunity to see what making TV in a pandemic was like. It was, as you might expect, interesting, but I can say little within the limits of the contract that I signed, which appeared to be longer than the actual interview. So I can offer no clues as to who, what, where or when – indeed I'm not sure I know that myself.

So why did I do it? Because I had made a promise to a friend, and I was not going to let anyone down. And it was an interesting experience. I had not done any TV since a Channel 5 documentary back in 2004, when I had newly become a full-time carer. TV had changed since then. UFOs were no longer a quirky subject that appeared once every few years, but had become a TV genre in their own right on the 900 channels that had to be filled. Some things hadn't changed; I still had to put the presenter straight as to what a ufologist actually was. He was genial, and the interview was fair, but I have no idea what it was aiming at; with TV, I have learned to live in hope and fear the worst.

Of course, making a programme in a global pandemic meant social distancing of not just a few feet but 200 miles, and fancy equipment for me to set up and use from home. Otherwise, it was much like hundreds of other interviews over the years. The problem remains that the only people who really understand ufology are those who have invested time in it; and (with exceptions – often successful ones) ufologists are less interested in wowing the audience than are the producers. Yet, understandably, that is what the audience expects. In many ways, TV interviews are like one party doing an election broadcast on behalf of another: whatever you say can always be 'changed in the edit' to fit what the programme wants to say – which may be the opposite of what you wanted to say.

However, it struck me that one thing the pandemic has achieved is to turbocharge societal change – including the way we now communicate in virtual reality rather than actual reality. I wonder if this provides the UFO community with an opportunity to harness this technology in order to overcome the difference between what the media want to sell and what ufologists wish to tell. Zoom and YouTube have rocketed in popularity as people have been isolated



LEFT: Jenny grapples with the challenges of making TV programmes from home.

with time on their hands. Now that we are, hopefully, edging back to normality, perhaps this is a chance to do something new as a UFO community and become our own broadcast medium.

Up to now I have only really seen attempts online to copy what the media already do – the temptation is to provide clickbait and get maximum viewers. But I think the real opportunity here is to bring the serious UFO community – disparate, reduced and scattered to four corners of the globe – back together with a purpose we appeared to have lost. After all, what's really important about these new media is that they are easy to use, accessible to most people and free for anyone with a computer or smart phone to access. So even if you attract fewer viewers than a sensationalist programme seeking to contact aliens, you would still have access to a lost world of UFO investigation that we few who are serious need to get back.

So the question is, how do we use this opportunity? In what ways can global DIY media be exploited to change for the better how we do ufology? I hope that readers will think about this and perhaps submit some ideas to this magazine. Indeed, I suspect the same principle extends into many of the other fascinating areas that FT covers.

There's certainly the possibility of holding virtual debates, or online versions of the much-missed UnConventions of yore – especially as issues of costs and travel restrictions may make 'live' events difficult for some time. Not needing to attract a large audience or go bust means that such online forums could focus on specific topics and invite researchers to present or thrash out ideas in a way that would be impossible at an open conference. To be

blunt, conferences were always for the audience and not to progress research – but virtual conferences might be able to do some actual work. Another advantage would be that experts might be happier to provide input to such events than to TV programmes which can edit what you say so you say something else. I was a member of the BUFORA Council in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, and some of those

meetings would have given the Handforth Parish Council viral video a run for its money in terms of banter and bureaucracy; but the exposure of disagreements would not harm the image of UFO research, as everyone assumes we all think alike anyway – when, of course, we really don't.

Another option would be a YouTube channel inviting the public to offer their stories or evidence to a rotating panel of UFO researchers or related experts – a way for witnesses to connect, ask questions and get some evaluation of a baffling experience they have had. Live conferences can be intimidating; with this format, you could post your message to the channel anonymously and still get instant responses from those with relevant experience. This approach has endless possibilities to reach out to those who may never have had the chance to engage with the subject in other circumstances.

There might also be a way to set up a Virtual UFO Tracking community, with live Web Cams in locations where UFO activity is being reported; if there's another lockdown, people could spend some of their free time observing and recording anything on the feed. Being proactive is something ufologists too rarely attempt; yet if UFOs are real, then maybe it's time to go looking for them and not just wait until they've been and gone.

These are just things that I have mused about recently, but I am sure readers can think of many more ideas.

This pandemic has changed the world in ways we do not yet understand. If we use that as a catalyst for change, then perhaps this global nightmare will inspire something positive: ufology is certainly due a kick up the rear...



# ANOMALOUS BIG CATS

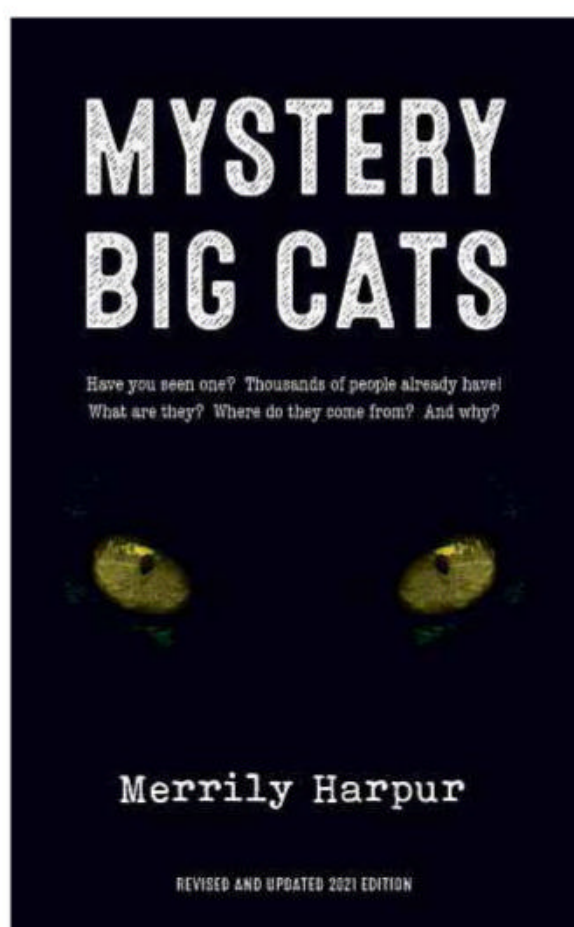
## THE MYSTERY CONTINUES

It's been 15 years since **MERRILY HARPUR** published her 'heretical' study of Britain's elusive big cats, arguing that their contradictory nature made them more akin to fortean phenomena than flesh-and-blood creatures. With an updated edition hitting the shelves, she asks what has changed in the past decade and a half, and whether new technology has brought us any closer to solving the ABC mystery...

**A**s soon as I opened the unfamiliar email, the familiar flush of excitement, foreshadowing something strange, came over me – much as it came over the BBC's Clare Balding when she saw an anomalous big cat in Herefordshire: "I was fizzing!" And I hadn't even seen an ABC myself, I was simply reading the report of a stranger who had – in Norfolk on 8 March 2021, just the night before. Adam began:

"It was yesterday – a cloudy evening and becoming dusk at about 6.10pm – and I was going for my usual after dinner walk towards our local church in Mautby. Opposite this ancient church are two fields, and in one of them, over to the right, I became aware of a dark mass, running. At first I thought it was a deer..."

With the publication of *Mystery Big Cats* in 2006 I had felt pretty much big-catted-out; but invariably as soon as I read a new report such as Adam's I was immediately back in that thrilling landscape where encounters with the unknown happen. In the book I had suggested that ABCs are members of a family the ancient Greeks called *daimones*, in English "daimons" (and not to be confused with demons). They are beings which exist in every culture, and their common characteristic is to be contradictory: either bigger or smaller than us, tangible yet ephemeral, benign or menacing by turns, equally absurd and frightening, both there and not-there, sometimes ridiculous and sometimes impressive, often equally purposeful or meaningless. They are so contradictory that any attempt to grasp, categorise or classify them leads to confu-



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sion... until one finally twigs: their ambiguity is the point. They seem to provoke us into discarding our post Enlightenment insistence that they be either solid flesh-and-blood beings or wraiths; they tease us into making sense of them in another way.

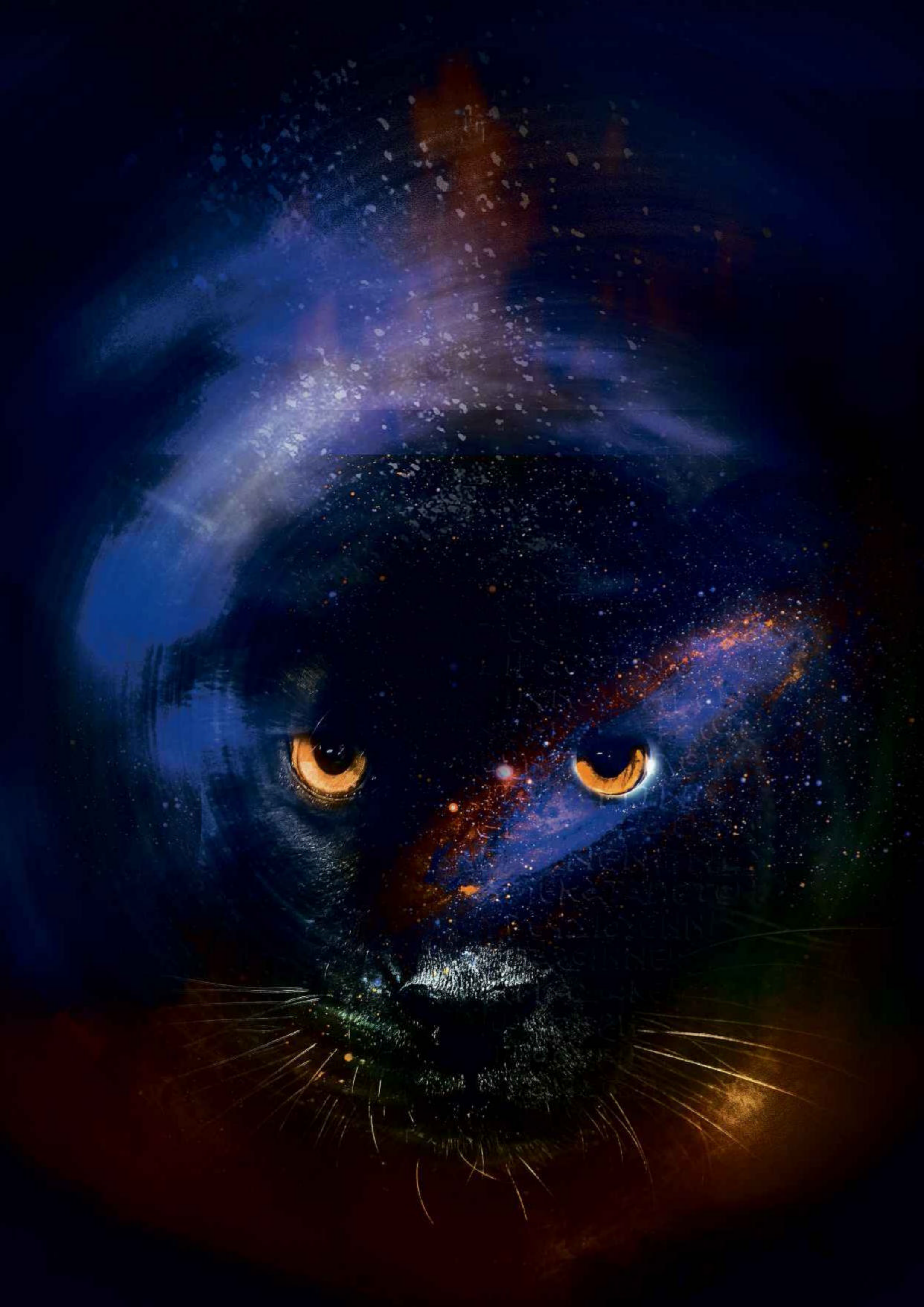
### "A BLACK MASS"

In the second half of *Mystery Big Cats* I pointed out those aspects of our ABCs which resemble other daimons, ancient and modern: dryads, fairies, goblins, *djinn*, the *Sidhe*, fauns, the Cornish piskies, the woodwose, Black Shuck, hulderfolk, UFOs, Will O' The Wisp, men-in-black, werewolves, lights in the sky – I could go on indefinitely. As intermediate beings, daimons often favour liminal zones, and indeed Adam's encounter happened at a liminal time and place: twilight, an ancient landscape and church. Hardly surprising then that it was during a solitary stroll in such a suggestive scene that he became aware of "a black mass" moving. He continued:

"It got as far as the border of the field which has a tree on a bank – here it hid behind the tree for a few seconds and peered around the side of it. I say peered, but at no time did I see the head of this thing – although I felt it was watching me. It proceeded now to move out into the open of the second field – and then it ran at such a speed that my eyes had trouble focusing and following it in the dimming light. It ran so fast!

"It then proceeded to jump over the bank on to the road where I was standing, and stopped, watching me. At this point it was about 20ft [6m] from me. I am 5' 6" [1.68m] and I would guess that it would have reached up to my hips, just, in height. Again, I have to state that I could see no head and certainly no









ABOVE: ABC researcher Rick Minter and presenter Clare Balding working on an episode of *Ramblings* for BBC Radio 4 during which Clare had an ABC sighting on air.

eyes, but I knew it was looking at me.

"Now, I call this a cat from the way it moved – on occasion lowering itself on to its front like a cat that is ready to pounce; it did this a couple of times. And the way it ran reminded me of how I had seen cheetahs and big cats run on wildlife programmes. It was so near to dusk I could see no tail, only how it seemed to grow in length when it lowered itself – just like my pet cat does – and also it looked around the tree in my direction just like my pet cat used to when I was playing with him.

"I did not feel frightened but neither did I want to take my eyes off this 'cat'. I was too mesmerised to reach for my phone to take a picture. It all happened so fast, and my mind was trying to make sense out of what I was seeing. It seemed to circle me at speed but in no way did I feel in danger at any point.

"I blinked and it disappeared into the woods on the other side of this road."<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, Adam is a professional psychic and is familiar with the idea of daimons. In a different location near his village he is aware of elementals peculiar to Norfolk, calling them *hyter* sprites (see FT397:63).<sup>2</sup> And yet, being practised at distinguishing between different kinds of perception, he is adamant that the ABC he saw "was definitely physical in nature rather than strictly psychic".

### "EVERYTHING CHANGES IN YOUR HEAD..."

When I reopened my file to log more recent reports, such as Adam's, and to update *Mystery Big Cats*, I found that in the years since 2006 much had changed. Technology had arrived to illustrate ever more vividly the interface

between the daimonic world and our quotidian reality. Podcasts and YouTube channels had sprung up to allow ordinary Joes an opportunity to describe their own encounters with the unknown. Indeed, Clare Balding's sighting was recorded live on air, during her Radio 4 programme *Ramblings*.<sup>3</sup>

Inevitably the largest genre of online sightings concerns UFOs. However, my own interest lay with the more obviously chthonic daimons, such as the wodewose or woodwose which the marvellous Deborah Hatswell records in her YouTube channel,<sup>4</sup> the ghastly dogman in *Dogman Encounters*<sup>5</sup> and richest of all, *Sasquatch Chronicles* hosted by Wes Germer.<sup>6</sup> In well over 700 episodes and counting, Wes allows witnesses to describe encounters with that famous North American daimon, Bigfoot or Sasquatch, without interruption or judgement. Possibly the most extraordinary narration among these is by an Englishwoman in Episode 515. 'Claire' had arrived in California on a work project, and in her spare time had made her way to a beach near Big Sur forest in the hope of photographing sea-otters. Sitting quietly on some rocks she suddenly felt spooked and looking round she noticed what she at first thought was a huge cat. It then appeared much bigger and bulkier than a cat and when it rose from all fours and stood up she saw it was a bipedal man-like creature, covered in hair and at least seven feet tall. "I had never seen anything like it in my life," she says. Moreover, there were five more of these creatures coming around the headland. Claire describes the strange chattering of the group and the threatening behaviour of the largest male, the incredible speed at which he

moved, arriving in front of her "at the flick of a switch", her voice shaking as she relives the trauma. She describes having seemingly fainted and coming round to find herself 10 metres (33ft) from her car, bruised and scratched, with her Barbour over her head, having been apparently dragged by the coat the half mile back to the car park.

It is impossible not to believe the event as Claire described it. But it is rarely that witnesses are dragged from one reality to another in such a brutally physical way. More often the witnesses, finding themselves the connecting principle between the daimonic world and our reliable reality, are left puzzled, wondering, terrified or awestruck rather than bruised. In the words of one of Rick Minter's informants, Amy Louise from Hampshire: "It opened my eyes. You never expect to see something like that, and once you do you think 'Oh my goodness'... Everything changes in your head."

### "THEY EXIST TO BE NOTICED..."

Rick Minter is a veteran of ABC research and follows Wes Germer's format of interviewing witnesses in depth by means of some sagacious questioning but basically allowing them to describe events in their own unadorned words. Moreover Rick elicits their feelings and ideas about their encounters. As he thoughtfully remarks: "Big cats are about people." His website and podcast *Big Cat Conversations* is therefore a treasure trove of primary sources.<sup>7</sup>

While the physical evidence for ABCs being nuts-and-bolts animals, the descendants of zoo escapees or released pets, remains scarce and ambiguous, this is still – after all these years – the orthodox 'explanation'. Yet the



first-hand accounts relayed by investigators such as Rick provide another rich vein – one that favours my own more heretical theory, that these creatures are modern-day daimons. They display the anomalous features and elusiveness of creatures which can pass between different worlds. For instance the big cat that startled Amy Louise was lynx-like, in that she describes its ears with black tufts extending them “as if someone had glued them on”. Yet in other respects it was a classic puma, sandy coloured with a long tail – whereas, of course, lynxes are mottled with very short tails.<sup>8</sup> The black panther-like cat ‘John’ saw – at close quarters from his motorhome – was muscular and lean “with a freakishly small head”. Yet the one he saw from the M25 had an unusually large head, like a jaguar. Another of Rick’s reports, from Hertfordshire, describes a black panther with spotted back legs, while another witness saw a huge black cat with big black pointed ears – not a characteristic of the leopard family, which have round ears. There was certainly something a little otherworldly about this latter cat, sitting on its haunches on a path through a reed bed: it was slender and graceful with “gleaming yellow eyes” and a purple sheen to its long black hair which the wind was parting. It “melted away” in a fluid movement “like water”, leaving the witness puzzled: “Nothing was quite right.”

Moreover, whereas most ABCs display an air of confident indifference to the witness, others’ behaviour is often strange – as though they are not sure where they are. Angler Nigel Sweet was setting up his rods early one morning at a lake in the Coalpit Fields area of Bedworth, Warwickshire, when he became aware of a large, dark creature on the other bank. “It was cat-like with a long tail and kept crouching down every few yards and looking around as if it had been startled by something. It looked thin as if it has had a rough time and was desperately looking for food. It wasn’t trotting like a fox – it was stealthy and feline in its movements.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most commonly observed of the ABCs’ odd behaviours is that of crossing the road in front of cars. Wes Germer notes exactly the same phenomenon when it comes to Sasquatch – “Why do they do that when they must have heard the car coming from miles away?” It is almost as if they *want* to be seen – briefly. Maybe, as veteran fortean Jim Boyd puts it: “They exist to be noticed.”

The Hertfordshire cat was seen near a landfill site, where a tram track runs beside the path. In *Mystery Big Cats* I write about the part that topography seems to play in the apparitions of ABCs, noting (as have many other ABC researchers) how often they seem to appear on or near quarries, tunnels, pits, but especially rail tracks. I wondered, in that book, if straight lines in the landscape might not precipitate balancing forms of energy, as Taoism suggests – forms which might become visible. Fanciful though this might be considered, I could not help noticing that railways continue to feature frequently in ABC encounters. Perhaps one of the most gripping was that related to Rick



## EVIDENCE FOR ABCS BEING FLESH-AND-BLOOD ANIMALS REMAINS SCARCE

Minter by Billy Brown, who was a railway line inspector in the Peak District. Walking the track towards Edale Station at night he saw a black panther sitting looking at him in the station car park, not 10 metres [33ft] away... “I’m getting chills telling you this...” he informed Rick. “It was jet black, shiny, tiny ears – an absolutely beautiful creature.” Billy observed it for several minutes, as it sat watching him imperturbably, a wisp of steam coming from its nostrils in the cold night.<sup>10</sup>

### “THE NUREYEV OF WILD CREATURES...”

Just as in the decades from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the continuing paucity of physical evidence for ABCs contrasts with the endless, vividly described sightings at close quarters

LEFT: Wes Germer, the host of *Sasquatch Encounters*. BELOW: Sir Benjamin Slade in Mike Coggan’s film *Chasing Shadows: Britain’s Big Cat Mystery*; the gun-toting baronet went hunting for a black leopard on his Somerset estate.

by what can be considered cast-iron witnesses. Recently this dichotomy between the two kinds of information has been explored by various documentary film makers, including Mike Coggan, one of whose award-winning productions I explore in the new edition of *Mystery Big Cats*. (You can see *Chasing Shadows* at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_gJfkvoxQW0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gJfkvoxQW0).)

However, as we are all aware, a film crew is no longer needed to film an ABC – everyone has a phone in their pocket. And yet still no unambiguous film of an ABC, whether from a phone or a trail cam, has emerged in the last few decades. There are films, certainly, of distant black blobs which do often look panther-like – but nothing that Sir David Attenborough would put his name to. Perhaps the best, if ghostly, image of a big cat did show up on a police camera in Edinburgh. A baby had been found abandoned and officers were searching for its mother. They called in Sgt Nicholas Whyte’s helicopter team to check out Arthur’s Seat, the crag that looms over Edinburgh, with infra-red camera gear. Sgt Whyte said:

“We started our search and found a large heat source lying on the ground. I directed a policewoman towards it, and as I was doing this the heat source got up – and it was a large cat. It was not your standard domestic cat or small moggy but more like a puma. We told the officer to stay exactly where she was and the cat bounded off, never to be seen again. It was one of the most astonishing things I have ever seen on our cameras.”<sup>11</sup>

Scotland has produced a wide variety of ABC sightings over many decades, and continues to do so. It also produces one of the anomalies that disproves the theory that ABCs could be released or escaped pets or their descendants. For instance it was in Scotland that two witnesses saw a black panther-like



COURTESY GRIZZLY.CO.UK



animal cross the road in front of their car. It was “muscular, with a glossy coat – and much bigger than a dog, about 3ft [90cm] high and 5 or 6ft [150-180cm] in length, with a long tail.” It was broad daylight, and they had a good look at it as it was only 30ft (9.1m) in front of their car when it crossed, quickly disappearing into the field opposite. This couple, however, were on the Isle of Arran, driving to get the 7.30am ferry to Ardrossan and had just passed through the village of Shiskine heading to Brodick.<sup>12</sup>

How likely is it that a black panther could have found its way on to a Scottish island by human agency? Moreover there have been several reliable sightings of black panther-like ABCs on the Isle of Mull, as I describe in the book. When I was researching those sightings I rang the postmistress on Mull to ask her (just to make absolutely sure) if anyone had ever kept big cats on the island, or whether there had been a zoo there, or whether it had ever been visited by a travelling menagerie or circus. There was a long, incredulous silence from her at my clearly daft question; and finally: “Have you ever *BEEN* to Mull?”

The Republic of Ireland is as remote as Mull – culturally if not topographically. Yet it too has some of the most exotic ABCs on record. I detail two historic ones in the book, but a more recent one is equal to those literary examples in extravagance alone. Ned Egan was driving his van in Blackbog, Huginstown, in County Kilkenny one early evening in summer,

when he noticed a black panther-like animal running in the adjacent field towards him.

<sup>13</sup> He watched it for about 20 seconds as it leaped into the road and crossed in front of him. Far from being terrified Ned was entranced:

“I was a bit in shock when it cleared a fence at great speed, bounced once on the road, and cleared the low bank on my right as if it wasn’t there. I’d love to have had a witness with me – but people would then only say ‘two liars instead of one’ in that case. A camera would have been no use, because of the rapidity. I saw it, and I’m glad I did, because I’ve never seen such a marvellously graceful animal in my life. It was the Rudolf Nureyev of wild creatures, the Ulanova of beautiful animals – and stuff the naysayers and disbelievers! I’d love to see it again – but not at close quarters!”

As the evidence of witnesses like Ned piles up, the “naysayers and disbelievers” are on increasingly shaky ground. All they have left to keep them sane is common sense, Newtonian physics, and evolutionary biology. In proposing the continued existence, in their various forms, of our traditional daimons, I have at least attempted a different footing on which to make these multitudinous beings intelligible. And if it still seems like a crackpot

theory, bear in mind that – strictly on the evidence – *all* theories are crackpot. Yet again, it seems, we might be forced to conclude that ABCs are not so much a problem to be solved, as a mystery to be entered into.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pers. Comm.

<sup>2</sup> John Kruse. “From Norfolk come the little known *hyter* (or *hikey*) sprites. They are small and elusive fairies, but they are said to be favourable to humans and will return home lost children they come across (and stray donkeys too). Oddly, the threat of the sprites was actually more frequently deployed by parents as a sort of nursery bogie to get children to behave.” <https://britishfairies.wordpress.com/tag/hyter-sprite/>

<sup>3</sup> 5 June 2014. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b045c0ht>

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Hatswell; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSz2WG7juow](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSz2WG7juow)

<sup>5</sup> <https://dogmanencounters.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sasquatchchronicles.com/category/episodes/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://bigcatconversations.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bigcatconversations.com/>. Episode 34, July 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *Nuneaton News*, 27 Aug 2010.

<sup>10</sup> <https://bigcatconversations.com/>. Episode 40, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> *Sun*, 8 April 2012; <http://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/scotsol/homepage/news/4244890/Mystery-of-Edinburghs-big-cat-sighting.html#ixzz1rQRXjZmr>

<sup>12</sup> Reported by Gordon McCann to the *Big Cats in Britain* group, 25 Aug 2012.

<sup>13</sup> [www.kilkennypeople.ie](http://www.kilkennypeople.ie), 25 Jan 2012.

➡ **MERRILY HARPUR** is a painter, illustrator, cartoonist and author who has lectured internationally on ABCs and contributed many articles on this subject (and others) to FT over the years. She is the author of *Mystery Cats*, published by The Squeeze Press ([www.woodenbooks.com](http://www.woodenbooks.com)), RRP £14.95.



ABOVE: Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh, seems an unlikely home for a big cat, but Sgt Nicholas Whyte and his helicopter team picked one up on their infra-red camera.



# ANOMALOUS BIG CAT BULLETIN

**PAUL SIEVEKING** rounds up the latest mystery moggy sightings in Britain

*Fortean Times* has been logging ABC sightings in the UK for 45 years, following on from Bob Rickard's listings in *Info Journal* #13 (May 1974), which covered 1962 to 1973. Throughout the 1990s, my nationwide surveys detailed an average of 400 sightings a year right across the UK. Since then, many local newspapers have folded, leading to a precipitate decline of press reports arriving at Fortean Towers. However, the ABCs still prowl, as can be seen from the following trickle of reports. For my general survey of British ABCs, see **FT167:28-37**.

## 2020

In early August 2020, a sandy-coloured ABC, "the size of a medium dog" about 15in (38cm) tall, with dark spots and pointed ears, was photographed on Coldham's Common, Cambridge, by Dan Underwood (below). Maybe a savannah cat. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 12 Aug 2020.

Dr Andrew Hemmings of the Royal Agricultural University in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, has identified five recent animal carcasses in the UK with tooth imprints on their bones that could only have been made by a non-native cat the size of a leopard or puma. Rick Minter of the Countryside Agency has recorded 1,300 ABC sightings in the UK over 10 years. One report was of a black leopard that followed two dog walkers in May 2020 for about a minute near Oldbury-on-Severn, South Gloucestershire. Minter takes a conventional blood-and-sinew view of ABCs. He said that about three-quarters of sightings are of black leopards – Labrador-sized cats with an elongated body, pronounced shoulder blades, a long, thick tail and flat face with rounded ears. The others are mainly pumas – brown big cats with slightly more pointed ears – and then some lynx. Most sightings occur at dawn or dusk, when the

ABCs use the darkness as an advantage over their prey. Minter believes there could be a breeding population of about 250 black leopards and 250 pumas in the British countryside. *Times*, 29 Aug 2020.

CCTV footage in Eastbourne, East Sussex, in late September showed an ABC "bigger than a Great Dane" (right). *Sun*, 1 Oct 2020.

Hiker confronted by 4ft (1.2m)-long ABC while watching a sunrise in Snowdonia, Wales, in October. In late November, a Snowdonia farmer said 10 of his flock had been killed in the previous four months by a single bite to the neck. *D.Star*, 24 Oct; *D.Mirror*, 28 Nov 2020.

'Leopard' photographed near back gardens in Codford, Wiltshire, in mid-December. *Sun*, 17 Dec 2020.

ABC photographed on Chester Meadows, Merseyside, on 13 December. At 7.30am on 16 December, a "large but slender" ABC was spotted at 30m (100ft) on Ince Marshes, Ellesmere Port. Later, the witness photographed a large pawprint in mud 300m (328 yards) from his sighting. *Liverpool Echo*, 20 Jan 2021.

On 30 Decem-

ber, 10 sheep were killed in Marton, near Macclesfield in Cheshire. The farmer had previously reported a "very large black cat-type animal" near the farm. Then on 8 January 2021, a sheep and two lambs were found dead in nearby Winsford, killed by a predator larger than a dog. *Sunday Mirror*, 10 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 11 Jan; *Sun*, 13 Jan 2021.

There were 12 ABC reports in and around the Lake District in 2020, attributed to the "Beast of Cumbria". Sightings have been logged for decades. Sharon Larkin-Snowden, who set up a "Big Cats in Cumbria" Facebook page, said: "The most recent sighting was at Thirlmere, where there have been

reports of a black-and-white leopard." She mentioned several sightings of two big cats near Kendall, leopard fur found in the vicinity, and sharp teeth marks on a deer jawbone suggesting an ABC kill.

*<i>12 Jan; Guardian, 13 Jan 2020.*

## 2021

Black ABC seen on a busy road near Talacre, Flintshire, about 20 miles (32km) from Pontybodkin on New Year's Day. At least five similar sightings of "the Puma of Pontybodkin" in the area since November. Then a van driver had an encounter near Pontybodkin on 14 January. "My headlights picked up the puma crossing the track," he said. "It was the size of a Labrador, black and athletic-looking. I braked and it stood 30 yards off, staring at me, eyes glowing in the dark, before slinking away." *Sun*, 6+16 Jan; *D.Mirror*, 16 Jan 2021.

On 2 January, cyclist spot-

ted jet black ABC at 6.30am on a footpath in Witney, Oxfordshire, about seven miles (11km) from Burford.

It was dubbed "the Beast of Burford", because of sightings dating back to the 1990s. (In 2005 a panther-like ABC was photographed opposite the Mason's Arms pub in Brize Norton.) *Metro*, 6 Jan 2021.

Recent ABC sighting in Lopen, Somerset. Black ABC filmed near Ashurst, West Sussex, at midday on 16 January. *Sun*, 18 Jan 2021.

ABC with pointed ears seen at 3am on Moel Famau hill in Flintshire, North Wales, presumably in early February. *D.Star*, 8 Feb 2021.

ABC seen near Lynnbottom Tip on the Isle of Wight on 6 Feb. Larger than a Labrador with long thick tail. Sightings on the island go back to the 1980s. *Isle of Wight County Press*, 12 Feb 2021.

A black ABC was photographed prowling through undergrowth beside fields near Thrupp in Gloucestershire on 25 March (above). The unnamed witness was about 100 yards away. It was said to be the fourth ABC sighting in the area since November 2018, including one in 2020 in South Woodchester, two miles away. *D.Mail*, 27 Mar 2021.

Cheshire has become an ABC hotspot in recent months, with at least 12 sightings in the county since last December. The latest was reported by a visitor to Caldy Valley Nature Park in Huntingdon, who said he heard "continuous growling and snarling from the undergrowth". Another recent sighting was of a four-foot long cat with a "great big tail" seen by two witnesses near the Chester Greyhound Retail Park on 12 February; a worker in the retail park reported seeing a "rather large black cat" later the same evening. *Cheshire Live*, 20 April 2021.



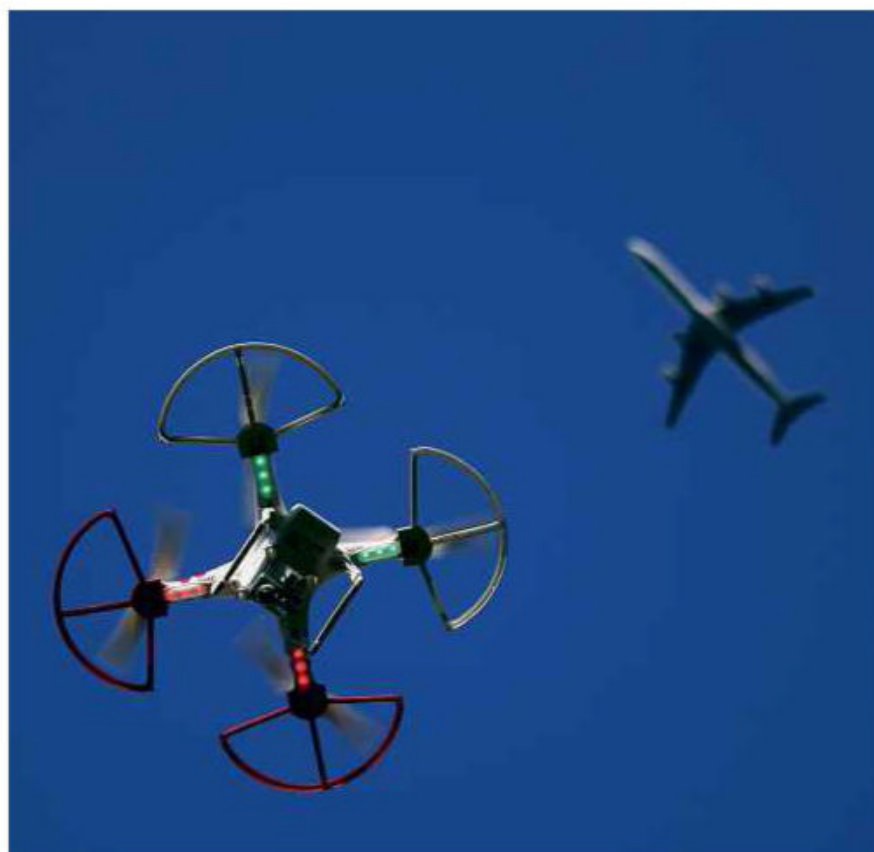


# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE DRONE KIND

Aircrew have reported a dramatic increase in close shaves with unknown flying objects, some of which may be hi-tech drones deployed in a covert electronic war between the US and its adversaries. **DAVID CLARKE** investigates the possible sources of the current UFO-drone epidemic including the mysterious incident that paralysed Gatwick airport in 2018.

**T**he global media have been buzzing with UFO stories since news broke that the United States Senate has demanded a report on 'Advanced Aerial Threats' from the US Navy's newly-constituted UAP Task Force. The report, due in June, is likely to summarise a series of puzzling incidents involving anomalous aerial phenomena that have plagued the most advanced ships and aircraft in the US fleet since at least 2004. In November that year fast-moving UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena) were detected by radars on the cruiser *USS Princeton*, part of the *USS Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group in the Pacific, that was operating in a military training zone off the coast of California (see **FT403:40-47**). Pilots of F-18 Super Hornets sent to investigate later saw and filmed unusual objects including a fast-moving Tic-Tac shaped object that appeared to emerge from the ocean surface.

Two other brief cockpit video snippets obtained by F-18 pilots, later confirmed as genuine and unexplained by the US Department of Defense, originated from a more recent UAP flap in a 'warning area' off the East Coast of North America. According to the *The New York Times*, groups of small UAPs, one resembling "a spinning top", were spotted frequently by US Navy Super Hornet crews during training missions from the aircraft carrier *Theodore Roosevelt* during the summer of 2014 through to March 2015. In 2014, a Super Hornet pilot filed a near-collision report after a close encounter with a number of small "unknown objects" that resemble those frequently reported by civilian airliner crews in UK airspace [see panel]. Others had no visible engine or infrared exhaust plumes



idents that occurred in a patch of restricted airspace off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina. Eight 'hazard reports', the equivalent of the 'airmiss' incidents investigated by the UK Civil Aviation Authority (UKAB), were filed by F-18 aircrew to the Navy Safety Center (NSC) between 2013 and 2019. These included three near mid-air collisions within one week in April 2014 that led an NSC official to warn "it may only be a matter of time before one of our F-18 aircraft has a mid-air collision with an unidentified UAS [unmanned aerial system]." <sup>2</sup>

## UAS OR UAP?

The UAS acronym highlights what Rogoway, in a follow-up investigation, believes is the most likely explanation: "A terrestrial adversary is toying with us in our own backyard using relatively simple technologies – drones and

balloons – and making off with could be the biggest intelligence haul of a generation." <sup>3</sup> While Rogoway does not reject the possibility that some UAP reports made by military aircrew cannot be accounted for so easily, he feels the evidence is compelling that Russia and China are using unmanned platforms to spy upon latest high-tech military technology deployed by the US during naval exercises.

He points out that all the NSC FOI reports describe "jet-powered, missile-like drones and unmanned fixed-wing aircraft", including multi-rotor drones and oddly shaped balloon-like objects, at high altitudes far out in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. One describes an "aircraft [that] was white in colour and approximately the size of a drone or missile" that passed down the right side of an F-18 Super Hornet with just 200ft (60m) separation while the crew were on exercises

## LT RYAN GRAVES COULD NOT EXPLAIN THE OBJECT HE SAW WHILE TRAINING

but could reach 30,000ft (9,150m) and apparent hypersonic speeds.<sup>1</sup> A spate of intrusions and near collisions led the Navy to update its formal reporting procedure for its pilots.

Using Freedom of Information requests journalists Tyler Rogoway and Joe Trevithick of *The Drive* uncovered details of earlier in-



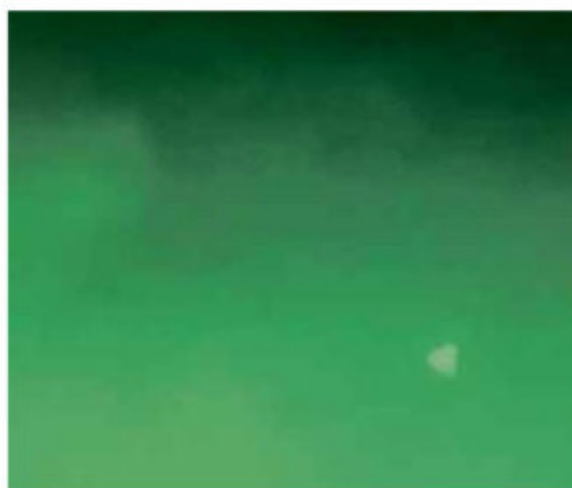


ABOVE: An F/A 18 Super Hornet flies over the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*. LEFT: Footage of a 'pyramid-like' UFO spotted by a US Navy destroyer in 2019

at 17,000ft (5,200m), having left the Naval Air Station *Oceana* in Virginia on 27 June 2013. This UAP was climbing and had a visible exhaust trail, but nothing was detected on radars. Another UAP reported in March the following year "appeared to be small... approximately the size of a suitcase, and silver in colour" as it passed within 1,000ft (300m) of a US Navy aircraft at 19,000ft (5,800m). A swarm of similar balloon-like objects appeared in the warning area in the following month and there were occasional reports by aircrew of air-radar detections of small stationary objects.

Rogoway's FOI requests also turned up a detailed flight incident report filed in March 2018 by an F-18 pilot who investigated a series of unexplained radar tracks in a warning area off the North Carolina coast. On reaching the location the pilot passed within 2,000ft (600m) of "a quadcopter-type drone" that appeared to be 3-4ft (90-120cm) wide and "seemed to be... hovering in place, or drifting with the wind". This drone was part of a swarm of small, stationary objects that seemed to be operating across an area 40-50 miles (64-80km) across. By 2018 this Super Hornet squadron's airborne radar had been upgraded with a new system that allowed them to detect objects with much smaller cross-sections that are likely to have been ignored by earlier radars.

Accounts by Navy aircrew who spoke to the *New York Times* described similar UAPs, detected both visually and occasionally on radar, high above the North Atlantic during 2014-15. These had no visible exhaust plumes but could reach altitudes of up to 30,000ft (9,150m) and apparently move at hypersonic speed. One F/A-18 Super Hornet pilot, Lt Ryan Graves, said he could not explain the



object he saw while training for a deployment to the Persian Gulf. But he and his colleagues speculated they were part of some highly classified advanced drone programme.

But operated by whom? In a podcast interview Graves went further, adding that "if we do have what we would call a 'red threat', one of our traditional enemies [could be] using some type of new technology, or hard to identify technology... soaking up our radar and our sensor and our comms, watching our tactics on a daily basis." <sup>4</sup> So far, the US Department of Defense has been reluctant to speculate about the likely source, possibly to hide sensitive intelligence it has been gathering under the cover of its high-profile UAP taskforce, but US Navy spokesman Joseph Gradisher admitted that new guidance was issued to the fleet following the flap in 2015. He said some reports "could have been commercial drones" but that in other cases, "we don't know who's doing this - we don't have enough data to track this."

In the absence of any obvious James Bond-style super-villains, no civilian source has the capability or motive to launch swarms of intel-gathering drones at high altitudes far

out at sea apart from the US's two main traditional adversaries. Long range unmanned surveillance drones such as the RQ-4 Global Hawk, used by the US Air Force and NATO in Iraq and Afghanistan, can reach 50,000ft (15,300m), and the armed forces of many other countries are working on secret UAV projects. In the Condign report, produced for the MoD's Defence Intelligence staff in 2000 (see **FT396:28-29**), author Ron Haddow said the USA and Israel have "a significant UAV programme" along with the European NATO nations. He admits "it is possible that experimental versions may be flown principally over coastal and sparsely inhabited regions of [the UK] in the future. Some of these may be reported as Unidentified Aerial Phenomena [UAP]."

As the *New York Times* noted: "No one in the [US] Defense Department is saying the objects were extraterrestrial, and experts emphasise that earthly explanations can generally be found for such incidents." There has been much online speculation about the US Government's secret investigations of UFOs in the context of 'extraterrestrial craft'. But journalists, including Tyler Rogoway, have begun to suspect the recent flaps have been generated not by ET visitations but as a direct result of electronic wargames that are ongoing between the United States and its two main adversaries in the Atlantic and Pacific. Since the 1940s, UFOs have proved a useful cover story for the testing of a range of other projects such as the U2 spy-plane and the Stealth program. So why not advanced drone programmes?



# THE GATWICK DRONE ENIGMA

*“Gatwick drone? There’s more evidence of the Loch Ness Monster” – drone enthusiast (Guardian, 1 Dec 2020).*

At 9pm on Wednesday, 19 December 2018, a security guard left work at Gatwick in Sussex, Britain’s second busiest airport. As he waited in the rain for a bus he saw two objects low in the sky carrying lights. One was hovering above a vehicle inside the airport complex and the other was flying alongside a perimeter fence. He called security control to report them and within minutes the main runway was closed to air traffic. As police and security patrols combed the area, further sightings of the ‘drones’ were made. Five police forces were now involved and Sussex constabulary sent up its helicopter and several of its own hi-tech drones in pursuit of the operators.

By daybreak, 58 flights into Gatwick had either been cancelled or diverted. According to a BBC *Panorama* investigation, 140,000 people were caught up in the chaos that followed the closure.<sup>1</sup> The 33-hour shutdown at Gatwick led 1,000 flights to be cancelled or delayed at an estimated cost of £50 million to airlines. Fearing further incursions, on the afternoon of 20 December Gatwick called in special military radar systems that can jam the signal between operator and the drone.

As the panic spread, there was much speculation about the identity and motives of the drone operators. Some



**ABOVE:** A Gatwick information board reports flight disruption “while we investigate reports of drones flying close to our airfield”. **BELOW:** Eddie Mitchell’s photograph of the Sussex Police Helicopter (below right); it was used by newspapers as a photo of the supposed drones.

media sources claimed airports were being targeted by terrorists or eco-activist groups with attacks using drones. Sussex Police continue to believe that a real drone or drones were involved in the Gatwick incident. But at an early stage in their investigation doubts were expressed by one of their own senior officers, Det Chief Supt Jason Tingley, who told the BBC: “We cannot discount the possibility that there may have been no drone at all.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Gatwick case shares some similarities with the phantom helicopter scare of 1973-74 that began with a series of ‘sightings’ by security guards at quarries where explosives were stored. These convinced senior police officers in northern England that the IRA were using a stolen or unregistered machine to steal explosives or for use in a jailbreak (see **FT228:30-31**). As in the 1974 scare, the Sussex Police decision to launch their own helicopter to investigate the mysterious intruder at Gatwick triggered

off a spate of further ‘sightings’ of the phantom drones.

Among the new witnesses was a Brighton-based press photographer, Eddie Mitchell, who drove to Gatwick with his cameras at the ready and two of his own drones locked in his boot. At 5pm on 20 December, Eddie saw and photographed what he believed were the white, green and red lights of the drone as it hovered above Gatwick airport. But when he downloaded the images he realised it was actually Sussex Police’s own helicopter.<sup>3</sup> Eddie later told the *Guardian*: “If I’m making a mistake – and I fly drones two or three times a week – then God help us, because others will have no idea.” But the tabloids were less concerned about the identity of the object in Eddie’s photographs. As Ian Hudson who runs the UAV Hive website explained: “Some journalists just didn’t really care if the photos they were using were a drone

or not.” One of Eddie’s images continues to appear on *The Sun* website captioned as “the drones”.<sup>4</sup> Ian told me that “the idea a couple of drones were flying around in the rain for prolonged periods” seemed far-fetched. He also finds it “beyond credible” that not one single clear photograph or video of the intruder has emerged and “a number of camera operators that were at Gatwick have spoken out since on social media about their belief there was no drone.”

Even more persuasive is the evidence from the specialist counter-drone systems (known as C-UAS) installed at Gatwick airport in the hours after the first sighting. One arrived at 2.40pm on 20 December and another was in place by 9pm when visual sightings were still being reported. Both were capable of detecting both the drones

and their transmitter, but neither recorded anything unusual.

Despite these evidential problems, in April 2019 Gatwick’s chief operating officer, Chris Woodroffe, told the BBC the airport authorities had received 170 separate “credible drone sightings” from 115 people including trusted staff such as security patrols and police officers. “They knew they’d seen a drone. I know they saw a drone,” Woodroffe said. “We appropriately closed the airport.” At the time of writing the operators have never been identified. A married couple from Crawley were arrested by Sussex Police and held in a police station for 36 hours on the basis that they owned a collection of model aircraft. They were released without charge after questioning. In June 2020 Sussex police paid the couple £200,000 in an out of court settlement. No one ever claimed responsibility for the scare or claimed the £50,000 reward offered by Gatwick for information that might lead to those responsible. In the aftermath, the

Government passed new legislation to widen the exclusion zone around airports from 1.5km (0.6-3 miles). Nationwide, police forces were given more powers to seize drones from their operators and prosecute those who break the strict regulations that prevent them from being flown in sensitive places.

Sussex Police formally closed their investigation of the incident in September 2019 after 18 months, having spent







**ABOVE:** Stranded passengers wait for flights to resume on 21 December 2018. **BELOW:** An anti-drone device at Gatwick Airport.

£800,000, with no further “realistic lines of inquiry”. The force said it had ruled out a link with terrorists and there was no evidence “it was either state-sponsored, campaign or interest-group led”. They believe it was a “serious and deliberate criminal act designed to endanger airport operations and the safety of the travelling public”.

Drone experts, including Ian Hudson, interviewed by journalist Samira Shackle for her *Guardian* investigation, remain unconvinced.<sup>5</sup> Probing more deeply, what exactly did the witnesses at Gatwick actually see? A moving object with bright lights attached that hovered and was seen fleetingly on a rainy night in darkness. In any other context this would be classified as a sighting of a UFO, but from the point of view of the airport authorities and police this *must be* a drone – because UFOs do not exist. But as Hudson told me, basic facts about the case don’t support this theory. “The first sighting was in the rain,” he said. “Drones tend to fail in the rain. In fact, there are few models that are capable of any kind of semi-reliable rain use.” Commercial drones also have in-built

geofencing software that blocks them from flying near sensitive locations such as prisons, stately homes and airports.

If the operators were clever enough to hack the drone’s software and evade the regulations to fly them into Gatwick airspace, why did they allow the UAV to carry lights? “The normal lights on drones are low power LEDs that couldn’t be seen at a significant distance,” he said. “Also, drones aren’t equipped as standard with a strobing light. Any mischievous drone pilot that didn’t want to be caught wouldn’t use lights. You would turn them off in the software or tape them up.”

Hudson and fellow UAV operator Gary Mortimer filed Freedom of Information requests

asking Sussex Police for basic information about the more evidential sightings. Their quite reasonable requests have been either rebuffed or ignored. Mortimer briefly flirted with the idea of the scare being a cover for some other covert operation. Now he feels the actual explanation is more prosaic. He told Samira Shackle that “one option is that something that wasn’t a drone was reported and then the next day, police flew their [copter] there and people saw that.” As UFO investigations have discovered time after time, ordinary objects can suddenly become extraordinary when people expect to see something unusual – or in this case threatening – in the sky. During the phantom helicopter

scare of 1973-74 there was widespread anxiety about Irish terrorists and police confirmation of the sightings triggered a visual epidemic. Today, that anxiety has transferred to other terrorist groups and mysterious drone operators.

The 2018 scare was not the first cluster of mysterious aerial sightings in the vicinity of Gatwick airport. Earlier incidents were reported in 2017, and the MoD’s archived UFO files reveal how on 15 July 1991 the crew of a Britannia Airways Boeing 737 returning from Greece and descending into Gatwick at 14,000ft (4,300m) saw “a small, black lozenge-shaped object” zoom past at high speed, 100 yards (90m) off the port side. Ground controllers confirmed a ‘primary

contact’ was visible on radar 10 nautical miles behind the 737, moving at a speed estimated as 120mph (195km/h). The airport tower warned the captain of another airliner of the hazard and this made “avoiding turns to the left to avoid the object, which had appeared to change heading towards it, but its pilot reported seeing nothing”. The investigation report on this case, completed in April 1992 by UKAB, could not explain the incident. They suspected the object might have been a large toy balloon but were “unsure what damage could have occurred had the object struck the 737; the general opinion was that there had been a possible risk of collision.”<sup>6</sup> Helium-filled toy balloons could potentially reach this height, but commercial drones cannot. More recently a series of airprox reports from aircrew involving close shaves with ‘unknown objects’ in Gatwick airspace have been investigated by UKAB including one from April 2018 that was placed in the highest collision risk category (see panel). On 28 April 2019 the runway was temporarily closed after a further “unconfirmed sighting” of a drone with three aircraft diverted to other airports.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

**1** BBC 1 Panorama, ‘The Gatwick Drone’, April 2019.

**2** BBC News online, 14 April 2019.

**3** @brightonsnapper tweet 7.57 am 20 Dec 2018: <https://twitter.com/brightonsnapper/status/1075661518933499904>

**4** *Sun*, 21 Dec 2018: [www.thesun.co.uk/news/8034127/gatwick-drone-menace-taunted-cops-flash-lights/](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/8034127/gatwick-drone-menace-taunted-cops-flash-lights/)

**5** ‘The Mystery of the Gatwick Drone’, *Guardian*, 1 Dec 2020.

**6** The National Archives DEFE 24/1956/1.

**7** BBC News Online, 28 April 2019.







**ABOVE:** One of the two Ground Control Stations at RAF Waddington operating unmanned aircraft systems in Afghanistan in 2014. **BELOW:** Richard Deakin, Chief Executive of the National Air Control Services.

## UAPS IN THE UK

Towards the end of an interview for Radio 4's *Today* programme in 2012, BBC business editor Simon Jack asked the Chief Executive of the National Air Traffic Control Services (NATS), Richard Deakin, a question posed by his children. They wished to know if the company, which runs the UK's air traffic services, "have ever been unable to identify a flying object". It was a good question, because since 2009, when the Ministry of Defence closed their UFO desk, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that employs NATS became the only remaining public body that retains an interest in UFOs. Pressed for a yes/no answer, Deakin admitted his controllers often receive reports of flying objects "that don't conform to normal flight patterns... not just in the UK but around the world, typically around one a month." But he played down the significance of this admission, adding: "It's not something that occupies a lot of my time."

More than 10 years have passed and reports of unknown objects – or 'drones' as air-crew are encouraged to classify them – now occupy quite a bit more of the CAA's time. All cases judged to have been a risk to aircraft and their passengers are reviewed by the UK Airprox Board (UKAB), which is sponsored by the CAA and the Military Aviation Authority (MAA). From 2017, the increasing number involving a close encounter *with an object other than another aircraft* led UKAB to launch what it calls SUAS or the 'Small Unmanned Air System assessment'. Under this reporting system, incidents are placed in one of four categories: drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), balloons (including toys and meteorological/research balloons), model

aircraft and "unknown objects".<sup>5</sup>

UKAB says most airprox reports "usually involve only a fleeting encounter" where air-crew are able to give no more than an outline description of the other air vehicle they saw. As a result, "the distinction between a drone, model aircraft and object is often down to the choice of wording by the reporting pilot". If a crew member has clearly described something with "drone-like properties" (e.g. four rotors), then it is categorised as a confirmed drone. But "if the reporting pilot can only vaguely describe 'an object' then it is classified as unknown object". In plain English, an *unknown object* is a UFO: it is unidentified, flying and an object.

As David Hambling notes (FT392:14) the dividing line between elusive 'drones' and UFOs has recently become wafer-thin from the perspective of both the aviation authorities and the police. The mutability can be traced in calls made by members of the public to various UK police forces during 2020 collated by the *i* newspaper. Using Freedom of Information requests, reporter Dean Kirby analysed 128 separate calls that mentioned 'UFOs'. Several were obvious UAVs, including one reported by a caller to police in Bangor, Northern Ireland, who described a "flying object that appeared to have solar panels".<sup>6</sup> Drone flaps have replaced epidemics of Chinese lanterns as the latest hybrid-UFO category, with mass sightings reported to police in north-eastern Colorado during the last two months of 2019 (FT391:17). Analysis of these identified the most likely explanations as the same that apply to UFOs: "planets, stars or small hobbyist drones".

Statistics from UKAB's log reveal a dramatic increase in "unknown objects" reports, from just seven in

2018 to 31 in 2019. A further 17 were logged last year as the Covid-19 lockdown reduced the numbers of aircraft in operation. One of the most recent involved a Boeing 737 crew who reported a "bright light and an object" approaching them head-on as they prepared to land at Leeds Bradford Airport on the evening of 1 September 2020 (see panel). This object "appeared without warning and there was no time to act", leading UKAB to place it in the highest risk category where "a definite risk of collision had existed". Ten of the cases reported to UKAB in 2019 were placed in this category. In one example, a pilot climbing out of Gatwick saw an object pass below the aircraft and under the right-hand wing just 30-50ft (9-15m) below. The small object "was contrasted against the clouds and appeared dark green in colour with a white light on top" and "may have been hovering". Four months earlier, on 30 December, the crew of a passenger plane on approach to Glasgow airport saw a long object "lit up in various places" pass between three and 10ft (0.9-3m) of the aircraft at 600ft (180m). Ten days earlier, a spate of drone reports brought flights from Gatwick airport in Sussex to a grinding halt for 33 hours (see panel).

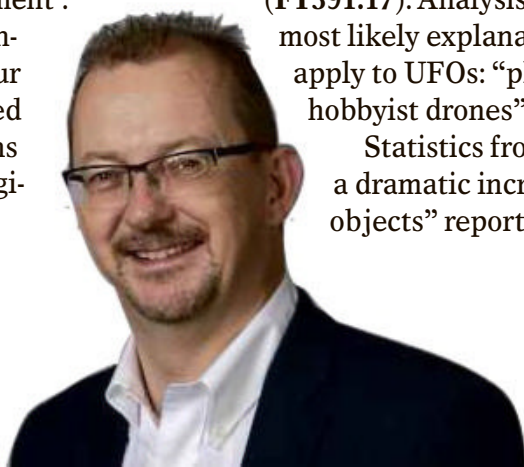
In eight out of nine cases reported in 2017-19 where UKAB could not determine the nature of the object, the close shaves occurred at altitudes ranging from 5,000 to 16,000ft (1,500-4,900m). Drone experts say it would be a struggle for a commercial drone to reach 6-7,000ft (1,800-2,100m) as their power source would fail at this height. Misperceptions of 'hobby' UAVs, balloons and other man-made and natural phenomena probably account for many of the reported drone sightings, in much the same way as with UFOs – but could some of the more baffling incidents have been caused by covert military drones that have strayed from their testing grounds? It stretches the bounds of credibility that such incursions would have been allowed in the vicinity of a busy airport like Gatwick.

But if a mistake had been made, at huge cost to the police and civilian authorities, would it be admitted?

### NOTES

- 1 *New York Times*, 26 May 2019: [www.nytimes.com/2019/05/26/us/politics/ufo-sightings-navy-pilots.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/26/us/politics/ufo-sightings-navy-pilots.html)
- 2 *The War Zone* 12 May 2020: [www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/33371/here-are-the-detailed-ufo-incident-reports-from-navy-pilots-flying-off-the-east-coast](https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/33371/here-are-the-detailed-ufo-incident-reports-from-navy-pilots-flying-off-the-east-coast)
- 3 Tyler Rogoway, 15 April 2021: [www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40054/adversary-drones-are-spying-on-the-u-s-and-the-pentagon-acts-like-theyre-ufo](https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40054/adversary-drones-are-spying-on-the-u-s-and-the-pentagon-acts-like-theyre-ufo)
- 4 Kevin Rose Show: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ufos-advanced-navy-fighter-pilot-ryan-graves/id1088864895?i=1000458559014>
- 5 UKAB's monthly SUAS log: <https://www.airproxboard.org.uk/Reports-and-analysis/Monthly-summaries/Monthly-Airprox-reviews/>
- 6 Dean Kirby, *The I*, 1 Jan 2021: [https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/reports-ufo-sightings-new-heights-lockdown-explained-aliens-801069?ito=twitter\\_share\\_article-top](https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/reports-ufo-sightings-new-heights-lockdown-explained-aliens-801069?ito=twitter_share_article-top)

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# UKAB 'UNKNOWN OBJECT' LOG 2017-2020



## 14 July 2017: Gatwick Airport

At 7.20pm the pilot of an Airbus A319 was holding at 7,000ft (2,100m) when the First Officer, in the right-hand seat, noticed an object close to the aircraft. He commented on the object to the captain, who also saw it. Both believed the object was not close enough to hit the aircraft and that they were on a trajectory to miss it. It was black and shiny/metallic in colour and appeared to be a square/rectangular cube. It appeared to be maintaining altitude and took around seven seconds to pass, making them believe it was hovering. The crew believed this was not a weather balloon, but because they couldn't make out any propellers on the side of the object, they weren't sure whether it was a drone. They alerted Gatwick control, who passed the information on to the aircraft behind; however, they did not report seeing it.

## 1 Feb 2018: Manchester Airport

At 6.10pm an Airbus A321 pilot was descending from 10,000ft (3,000m) when his eye was caught by a greyish thin-profiled 'something' which passed by very close at the same level down the left-hand side at great speed. His initial reaction was that he had seen an internal reflection in his glasses or the windshield, but the First Officer and another person on the flight deck also saw it. None of them had a clear view because it was in the landing-light beam for a split second. Their description

resembles another well-known 'unexplained' airprox report made by a Boeing 737 crew, carrying 60 passengers from Milan to Manchester airport, on 6 January 1995. They described a glowing wedge-shaped object, lit up like a Christmas tree, that passed down the side of the aircraft as they descended at 4,000ft (1,200m) on their approach to the runway.

## 5 May 2018: Gatwick Airport

A B757 airliner pilot was approaching Gatwick in busy airspace at 12.45pm when the First Officer said: "What's that?" The Captain looked out and saw a fairly large, irregular shaped, dark black object pass down the left side at the same level, within 200ft (60m) of the aircraft, heading in an easterly direction. No avoiding action was needed but the incident was reported to Gatwick control.

## 5 July 2018: Birmingham Airport

A King Air BE90 pilot reported he was cruising at 16,000ft (4,900m), about 10 nautical miles north of Birmingham, at 9.30am when he saw a rectangular or elliptical object pass 500-1000ft (150-300m) below the aircraft. He estimated it to be 50-100cm (20-40in) long, although he only saw it for about two seconds before it passed underneath the prop-driven aircraft. It was either hovering or travelling in the opposite direction, but there was no time to take any avoiding action.

## 30 Dec 2018: Glasgow Airport

At 6.45pm the pilot of an Embraer 175 passenger plane approaching the runway saw "an object pass between three and 10ft [0.9-3m] from the aircraft at the same level". The pilot could not tell what the object was, but "it was lit up in various places and was more horizontally long than it was vertically". The board was unable to identify the object but decided there was a definite risk of collision and "providence had played a major part in the incident".

## 15 Jan 2019: RAF Coningsby, Lincolnshire

An RAF Typhoon pilot was leading a pair of fighters from Coningsby to an exercise in the North Sea at 11.40am. After receiving clearance to climb to 30,000ft (9,000m) from 15,000ft (4,500m), he noticed an object at 11 o'clock about one nautical mile away, slightly higher and maintaining a constant altitude. The radar and data link showed no traffic conflicts. The object reflected sunlight and appeared to have a linear form. The object passed down the left-hand side of the Typhoon. The wingman independently saw the same object as it passed over the leader's aircraft. He maintained the formation at 15,000ft until they were clear of the object. Nothing unusual was noticed on the ground radar picture.

## 30 Mar 2019: London

A B787 airliner pilot reported

that a red coloured object passed down the right-hand side of the aircraft shortly after 2pm at 6,000ft (1,800m). It was impossible to identify the object, although it was large enough to cause concern.

## 28 April 2019: Gatwick Airport

An Airbus A319 was climbing out from the airport at 12.40pm when the pilot saw an object a few seconds after breaking through cloud at 17,000ft (5,200m). "It passed below them from the centre of the aircraft and under the right-hand wing" and was clearly contrasted against the clouds. The small object "appeared dark green in colour with a white light on top" and may have been hovering. UKAB placed this in the highest risk category.

## 5 May 2019: Gatwick Airport

An Airbus A320 pilot reported that on departure from Gatwick, while climbing at 2pm, a totally white object resembling a shoe-box-sized cube with a ball on top passed down the left-hand side of the aircraft, slightly above and within 160ft (50m) at 6,000ft (1,800m). The object appeared to be in level flight.

## 1 Sept 2020: Leeds Airport

A B737 crew reported that when approaching the runway at 10.13pm at 1,800ft (550m) both pilot and First Officer "suddenly saw a bright light and an object which appeared to be moving toward the aircraft, almost head on, slightly up and to the left." The object appeared without warning and gave them no time to act. The crew informed Air Traffic Control on landing who told them the West Yorkshire police helicopter had earlier seen "lanterns" in the area, but neither pilot believed that was what they saw. The UKAB board "were unable to determine the nature of the unknown object" but concluded that "a definite high risk of collision had existed".

Source: UKAB airprox log:  
<https://www.airproxboard.org.uk/Reports-and-analysis/Airprox-reports-2021/>



# THE MYSTERY OF MAUD'S ELM

Did a majestic old elm tree grow from a stake driven through the heart of an innocent young girl presumed to have committed suicide? Everyone from Cheltenham locals to Goth songwriters seems to think so, but **JAN BONDESON** finds that the 'legend' of Maud's Elm is precisely that.

*O the old Elm Tree that for ages past,  
Has bowed its majestic head  
To the gentle breeze and the sturdy blast,  
Still flourished o'er the dead;  
And whenever I gaze on its aspect bold,  
Or give ear to its mournful creak,  
Do I think what a tale would it unfold,  
Could its leaves or its branches speak.*

**M**aud's Elm was a historic tree of gigantic proportions, located in the Gloucestershire village of Swindon, which is today a suburb of Cheltenham. A legend that predates Victorian times tells that the elm originated as a wooden stake driven through the heart of Maud Bowen, a young village girl presumed to have committed suicide. Later, Maud's old mother was tied to a stake just by the elm to be burnt as a witch, on the order of the wicked Lord of the Manor, but he was struck dead and the old woman saved from the conflagration. Unlikely, I hear you say. But defer judgment until you have heard the full Legend of Maud's Elm...

## THE LEGEND

Maud Bowen was a virtuous girl living in the village of Swindon, the daughter of an old woman named Margaret who some thought was a witch. One day, Maud was sent into Cheltenham with some spun wool, but she did not return. The following morning, her lifeless body was retrieved from a nearby brook, as an old poem expresses it:

*The Swindon maiden lay cold and dead,  
A holy calm o'er her features spread,  
As though her spirit in peace had fled;  
No midnight murderer's stab could be traced,  
No ruffian's blow had her beauty defaced.  
So 'twas thought in the height of mad despair –  
She had cast away life and sorrow there.*

On the bridge close by was lying another corpse: that of Maud's uncle Godfrey Bowen, shot through the heart with an arrow; his left hand was still grasping the handrail, and in



## ACCORDING TO OLD CUSTOM, THE CORPSE OF A PRESUMED SUICIDE WAS IMPALED

his right hand were some rent portions of Maud's dress.

Sir Robert de Vere, the wicked Lord of the Manor of Swindon, made sure that a Coroner's inquest was held on the two dead people, uncle and niece. Swindon was in mourning for poor Maud, whereas Godfrey was not much missed, since he had been a miserly and cruel man, with contempt for religion. Crispin the Coroner found that Godfrey had been murdered by some person unknown, whereas Maud was branded a suicide, and ordered to be unceremoniously buried in the nearest crossroad:

**LEFT:** An engraving of Maud's Elm, from the *Cheltenham Looker-On* of August 1836. **FACING PAGE:** Maud's Elm in its prime, seen on a postcard published by Norman Bros. of Cheltenham.

*Alas, for Maud! A horrible doom,  
Denied her body a Christian tomb;  
By malice, revenge and terrible hate,  
A Coroner's inquest pronounced her fate,  
They dug her a grave in the King's highway,  
With no kind lips o'er her corpse to pray;  
They buried her there in the dead of the night  
While the torches flashed their lurid light.*

According to old custom, the corpse of the presumed suicide was impaled:

*A stake was from an elm tree riven,  
And through her spotless body driven.*

Miraculous to tell, the elm stake rooted in Maud's body grew to become a stately tree, known as Maud's Elm by the mourning villagers, who found it very wrong that the virtuous Maud, once the pride of the village, had been buried in a suicide's grave. Old Margaret Bowen was evicted from her cottage by the Lord of the Manor, having to live as a penniless tramp. Since she mourned Maud intensely, she used to keep vigil by the elm tree, watering it with her tears. One day, the Lord of the Manor and his suite came riding past on their way to Cleeve church, where the christening of his firstborn son and heir was to be celebrated. When he saw old Margaret keeping vigil by the elm tree, he thought that this human equivalent of Greyfriars Bobby had not yet suffered enough grief and ordered one of his henchmen to remove her from the site and drag her away:

*'What beggar is this that stops my path?'*  
*Sir Robert de Vere exclaimed in wrath,*  
*When he saw the form of the widow wild,*  
*Bent on the grave of her murdered child.*

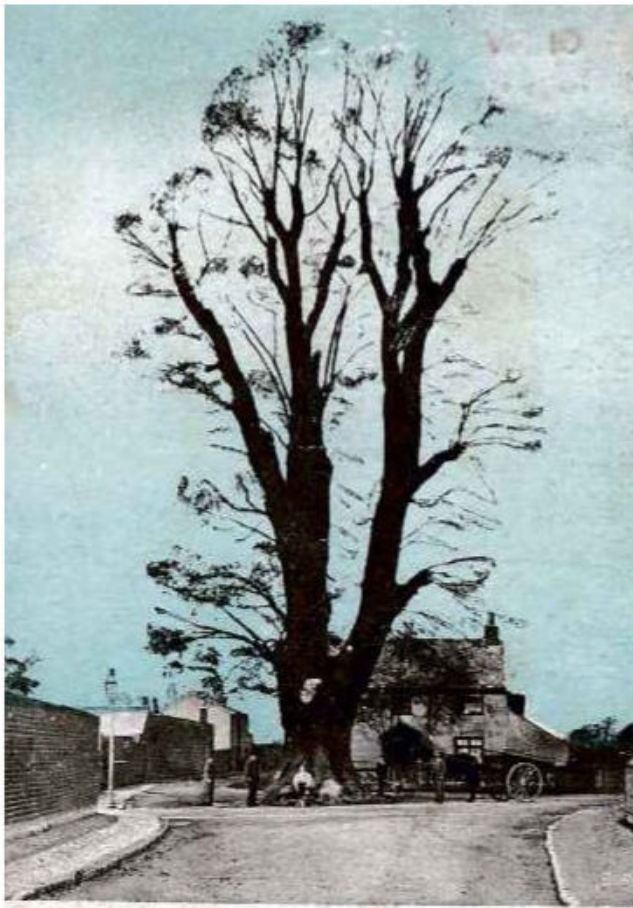
But just as Hubert the Vassal grabbed hold of the defenceless old woman, an arrow came





Maud's Elm. Cheltenham. 243.





**ABOVE LEFT:** Maud's Elm in its declining years, a postcard stamped and posted in 1905, issued by FM Bartlett of Cheltenham. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Maud's Elm cut down in 1907. **BELOW:** A page from the third edition of Built-Leonard's pamphlet on the legend, looking to emanate from the 1920s.

flying and struck him in the heart, killing him. The arrow came from a thick forest nearby, but when this was searched, there was no trace of the assassin. Since Sir Robert, who was a superstitious man, suspected sorcery, he ordered old Margaret to be arrested and dragged away to Gloucester gaol, awaiting trial for witchcraft and murder.

A fortnight later, old Margaret stood trial in Gloucester, prosecuted by Sir Robert de Vere. After she had been found guilty of witchcraft and murder, the Judge sentenced her to death and ordered her to be burnt alive at the site of the murder of Hubert the Vassal, at Maud's Elm in Swindon.

She was taken from Gloucester to Swindon in a cart guarded by officers, seated on a bale of hay that would be used to kindle the flames that burned her alive. A stake was erected and a pile of faggots constructed. Just as the fire was lit and old Margaret began roasting alive, the wicked Sir Robert wanted to mock and taunt the defenceless old woman one more time before she died, but an arrow came flying out of nowhere and struck him in the heart; after uttering some convulsive groans, he fell dead at the feet of the burning Margaret.

A few moments afterwards, the burning pile seemed to have reached its height: when the stake fell with a thud, there was nothing more to be seen but some smouldering ashes. What had happened to old Margaret was anyone's guess.

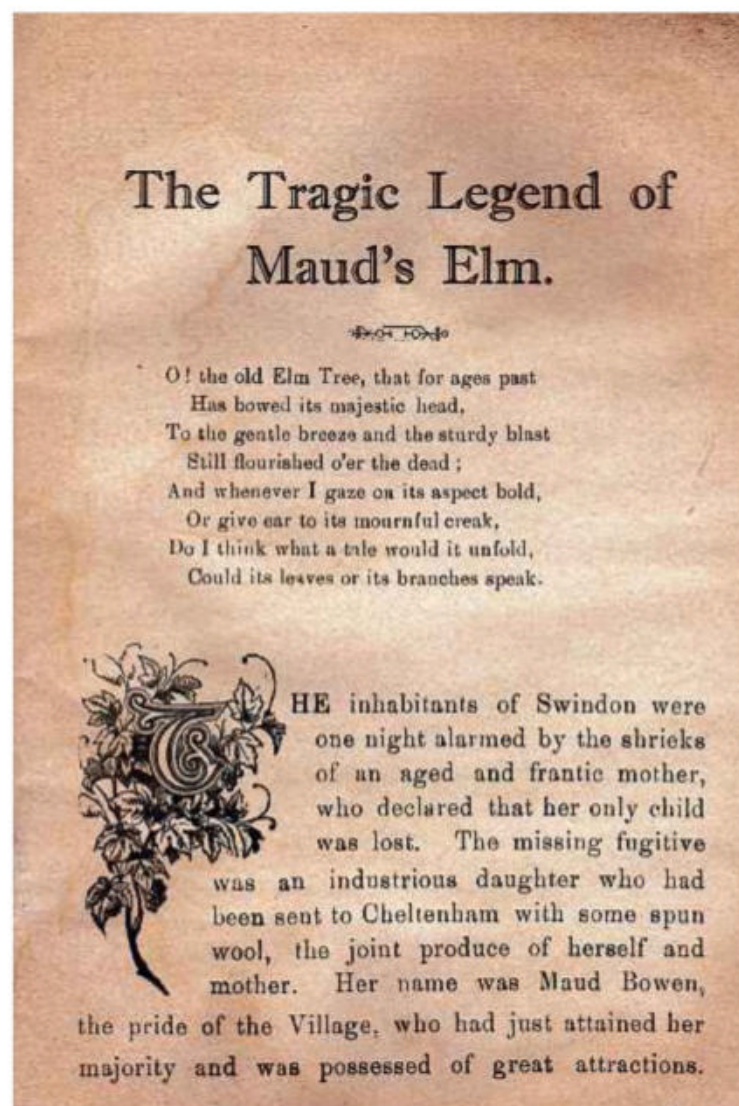
As the years went by, the Swindon villagers kept admiring the tall and stately Maud's Elm, and discussing, with bated breath, the mysterious deaths of Godfrey Bowen, Hubert the Vassal and

## AN ARROW CAME FLYING OUT OF NOWHERE AND STRUCK WICKED SIR ROBERT IN THE HEART

Sir Robert de Vere. The property once owned by the Lord of the Manor passed into the hands of strangers, and the little cottage once occupied by old Margaret the witch stood empty for many years. Nearly half a century had passed since the tragic death of Maud when a mysterious stranger was observed to be sleeping in old Margaret's deserted cottage, or keeping vigil underneath the elm tree, exclaiming:

*With bleeding heart I pluck a young green bough  
From that elm tree  
Whose obscure root, some fifty years ago  
Drew the dead blood from thee.  
Upon your lowly grave, sweet love, I fling  
My weary bones;  
E'er long we shall meet before the King  
Of Kings, and Throne of Thrones!*

When the villagers asked this mysterious man to identify himself, he said he was the old soldier Walter Gray, once a young Swindon swain who loved Maud dearly. Since she had been equally fond of him, they had hoped to marry. He had been known as 'Walter the Archer' for his uncanny skill with bow and arrow. The wicked Uncle Godfrey proposed marriage to Maud, hoping to recover the house belonging to her mother, but she remained true to Walter. Sir Robert de Vere, struck by her great personal attractiveness, had sought to make her his mistress, but once more Maud refused him with great moral firmness. The Lord of the Manor came up with another of his evil schemes, however: he promised Uncle Godfrey a cottage for free if he abducted Maud and took her to the manor house. But when Walter





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heard that Maud had gone missing, he sallied forth with his bow and arrows. Hearing a shriek, he could see Maud grappling with her uncle, and Sir Robert standing nearby. He shot Uncle Godfrey dead, but Maud fell into the brook and drowned, and the Lord of the Manor absconded unharmed. It was of course Walter who had clandestinely shot and killed Hubert the Vassal and Sir Robert himself; having exterminated his three enemies, he went out into the wars:

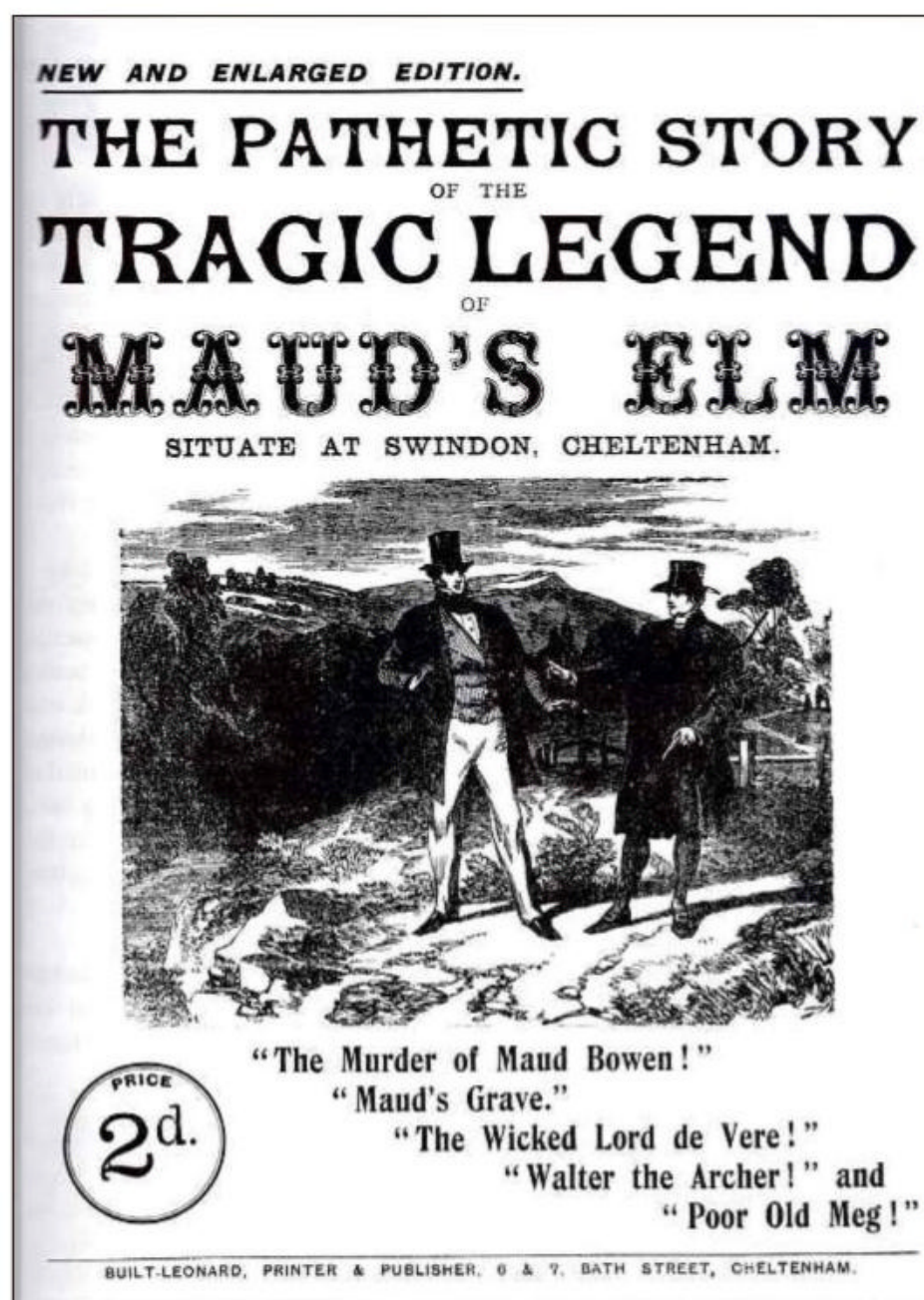
*A tear upon his pale cheek strayed,  
While thus he mourned the Swindon Maid,  
'When thou wert snatched from earth, my sainted Maud,'  
All joys were gone;  
I sought the wars, the soldier's bloody trade  
But still my heart was lone...*

### THE LEGEND & THE TREE

Thus is related the legend of Maud's Elm, repeated with minor variations at least since the 1830s. Walter Gray was called Walter Leigh or Baldwin in early accounts of the legend, which do not name the wicked Lord of the Manor; later versions call the Lord 'Sir Roger Francton' and add the embellishments that Maud gained his attention when she was the Queen of the May, and that Walter once defeated Godfrey in a wrestling match.

The earliest account of the legend I have been able to find is in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* of 11 May 1833; there is said to exist a Tewkesbury pamphlet on Maud's Elm printed in the 1840s, although no person has ever seen it. The Cheltenham printer Ernest George Built-Leonard printed a mid-Victorian pamphlet of his own, *The Tragic Legend of Maud's Elm*, containing the entire pathetic story from beginning to end; a new and enlarged edition was published a few years later, and a third edition as late as the 1920s. In 1889, Mr Alfred W Peachey, of Gloucester, published the three-page *The Lord and Maid of Swindon; Or, the Origin of Maud's Elm*. All these obscure publications are quite rare, although several libraries hold copies of Ethel Griffith's drama *The Black Maying; Or, the Legend of Maude's Elm*, published in Cheltenham in 1909.

It is only in modern times that the original story of the legend of Maud's Elm has been added to and distorted. The successful Goth and Pagan band Inkubus Sukkubus included the song "The Rape of Maude Bowen" on their 1994 album *Wytches*, adding the inventions that the 15-year-old Maud had been raped by her persecutors and flung into the brook; her defiled body was later "impaled as a vampire" to hide "the crimes of the rich". Writing in *Pagan Voice* magazine of



LEFT: An early edition of Built-Leonard's pamphlet on the legend, said by the Gloucestershire Archives to date from c. 1850.

Many other Cheltenham chroniclers from Victorian times mention the old tree and its legend. There are several photographs of Mauds' Elm from mid-Victorian times, showing it in a healthy state. A cottage nearby was known as Maud's Elm Cottage; a garden in the vicinity of the famous old tree was Maud's Elm Nursery, which produced a fluke potato weighing 32.5oz in 1856; a 17th century thatched cottage next to St Lawrence's Church in Swindon has been called Maude's Cottage for many years, in the belief that the heroine of the legend once lived there with her ill-fated old mother.

But evil times would come for Maud's Elm, the most famous tree of Cheltenham, and its surroundings. A later photograph issued as a postcard before 1905 shows the great old elm ravaged by disease, with only a few healthy branches remaining at the top. The authorities tried to fill its hollow trunk with cement, but this did nothing to restore

the health of the ailing tree. After a huge limb had fallen from it on 27 July 1907, the removal of the remainder was carried out on 31 July, using steam tractors to pull it down, since it was considered dangerous to the public. Maud's Elm Cottage nearby was also demolished a few years later, being in a derelict condition, and Maud's Elm Nurseries with its prodigious potato is no more.

In May 1943, according to the *Gloucestershire Echo*, the Cheltenham Corporation planned to plant a Wych Elm at the site of Maud's Elm, but although a veteran citizen sent them a copy of Built-Leonard's pamphlet, which he had purchased in Abergavenny more than 50 years earlier, these plans were never acted upon. In 1949, a disgruntled local wrote to the *Gloucester Echo* urging that another elm tree should be planted on the site, with a plate denoting its origin, but although his appeal ended with the ringing words "We, the people in the vicinity, believe the story to be true, and we also believe that the history of the locality should be preserved", it was ignored by the authorities.

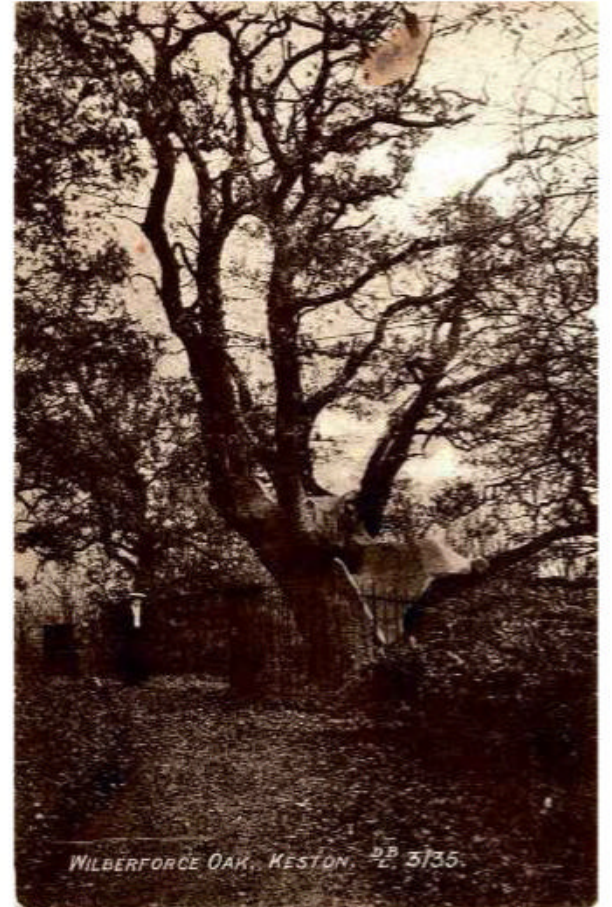
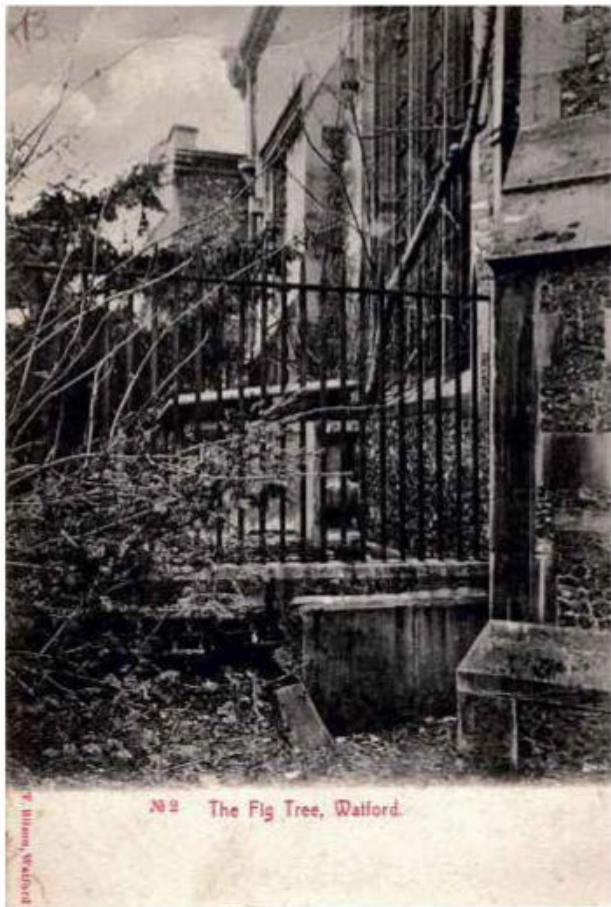
Today, the original site of Maud's Elm is treeless and barren, although some council flats nearby and a local bus stop has been named after the famous tree. There was once a 'Maud's Elm Terrace' but it seems to have disappeared; however, Maude's Cottage next to the church is still standing, in a good condition.

August 1995, a certain Tony McKormack – who seems to be a current member of the band – accepts these inventions as facts, adding some falsehoods of his own, namely that Maud had been stripped naked, that Old Margaret had been tortured by her persecutors until she had gone insane, and that she was tied to the elm tree itself rather than to a stake, ending with the false claim that Maud's Elm was struck by lightning in 1922 and blown to smithereens.

As late as the 1940s, there were plenty of Cheltenham people who believed the legend was nothing but the truth. Several commenters on the YouTube video of the Inkubus Sukkubus song claim that the song is based on a factual event, and that the Church ought to be deeply ashamed of its treatment of Maud and Old Margaret; they offer to send old photos of Maud's Elm to those of a doubting disposition.

John Goding, the author of the 1853 *History of Cheltenham*, confidently claims that Maud's Elm was now the most famous tree in Cheltenham, after the enormous Piff's Elm nearby had been recently cut down, a process that took nine sawyers 14 full days of work. By this time, Maud's Elm was a healthy tree, very lofty in stature so that it could be seen for miles around. It stood at the crossroads to Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, Cleeve and Gloucester. The trunk was 21 feet in circumference, and the footsteps of the many visitors to the tree had laid some of its roots bare.





ABOVE: The Watford fig tree, a card stamped and posted in 1904; Dick Turpin's Oak; The Wilberforce Oak, a card stamped and posted in 1914.

## THE MYSTERY SOLVED

The archaic nature of the legend of Maud's Elm suggests that if the story is at all true, it took place prior to 1700, at a time when corrupted Coroner's verdicts could not be challenged, suicides were buried at the crossroads, wicked Lords of the Manor threw their weight about without restraint, and witches were burnt at the stake. The story is contradictory and illogical: how could Maud, a young and fit woman, drown in a small brook? Why could people not apprehend Walter after he had dispatched Hubert the Vassal and Sir Robert de Vere? And what really happened to Old Margaret in the end? And why, if the events took place before 1700, is there no record of the legend of Maud's Elm prior to 1833?

An early account from 1777 names the elm at the Swindon crossroads as 'Mowle's Elm' and on the earliest map of Cheltenham and surroundings, from 1806, it is called 'Maul's Elm', a name it keeps on the 1828 Ordnance Survey map and in the 1832 *Stranger's Guide to Cheltenham*. The earliest mention of 'Maud's Elm' is in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* of 1833, but this does not prevent this periodical from issuing the following 1839 note, to one of its putative correspondents: "The Address to 'Maul's Elm,' though containing some good lines, is deficient in general interest: we must, therefore, decline its insertion in the *Looker-On*."

An article about Cheltenham in the *Lady's Newspaper* of September 1847 also provides food for thought: "Maul's Elm, as it is called, and a companion tree on the Tewkesbury-road, Piff's Elm, are considered, in the tradition of the neighbourhood, as ancient landmarks; and the curious in legendary lore will find the legend of Maul's, or, as it is there called, Mauds's Elm, in 'The Cheltenham

Album'." From the publication of Goding's influential history of Cheltenham in 1853, until the present day, the original name of the tree has been forgotten about, and the legend of Maud's Elm has reigned supreme.

As students of Queen Mary's Tree in Edinburgh (see FT374:48-51) will be aware, the Victorians were fond of making up legends about particularly old and majestic trees. Scotland has a healthy population of 'Queen Mary's Trees', presumed to have been planted by the tragic Queen's own hand, 10 of them at last count, whereas in reality she has not been recorded to plant as much as a tulip.

The Queen Elizabeth Oak in Hatfield Park (wholly decayed today) is said to have been the tree underneath which Elizabeth was sitting when she learnt of the death of Queen Mary; an unlikely scenario, considering that her predecessor had died in November. The Queen's Elm in Chelsea, said to have been planted by Elizabeth I with her own hand, was chopped down in 1745. Of Dick Turpin's Oak in East Finchley, behind which the celebrated highwayman is said to have hidden when he robbed the Mail in 1724, only a stump remains. The Wilberforce Oak, at Holwood House, Keston, underneath which the celebrated anti-slavery campaigner once debated with Pitt, was blown down in 1991. Wesley's Elm in Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire, got its name because the famous Methodist is once said to have preached in the open air. Cowper's Oak near Olney, underneath which the poet is said to have taken shelter from the sun, is dead and gone today, although the name survives as a pub nearby. A fig tree in the churchyard of Watford was said to have grown from the heart of an atheist lady who had expressed a wish, on her deathbed, that such a tree would grow from her heart if there was a God. Hunter's

Elm in Brentwood, Essex, was said to have been planted to commemorate a local teenage Protestant martyr burnt at the stake by order of Mary I. Latimer's Elm in Hadley, Hertfordshire, was said to be the tree underneath which another Protestant victim of the same Queen, John Latimer, once gave a sermon to Henry VIII.

Thus there are precedents both for the legendary motif that a tree grows from the heart of a buried person, and that a tree commemorates a person burnt at the stake. There is no doubt in my mind that the legend of Maud's Elm constitutes yet another imaginary tale connected with a particularly large and ancient tree: Maul's Elm became Maud's Elm in early Victorian times, and the fanciful story of the betrayed Maud and the martyred Old Margaret grew into a long and pathetic tale condemning clerical bigotry and the misdeeds of the rich and powerful.

There are brief modern accounts of Maud's Elm in R Brooks, *A Grim Almanac of Gloucestershire* (Stroud 2010), pp.53-55, and in R Beacham & L Cleaver, *Cheltenham through Time* (Stroud 2011), pp.10-11; the tree is also mentioned in J Hight, *Britain's Tree Story* (London 2011), p.120. There is a valuable collection of press cuttings, pamphlets and original material about Maud's Elm in the Gloucestershire Archives, without the consultation of which this article could not have been written.

♦ JAN BONDESON is a retired senior lecturer and consultant physician at Cardiff University. He is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of many books on fortean subjects, including *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* (2018), *Strange Victoriana* (2016) and *The Two-Headed Boy* (2000). His latest book is *Murder Houses of Edinburgh* (2020).



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## THE GENERAL IN HIS LABYRINTH

In the last of three pieces about strange Latin American leaders, **SD TUCKER** remembers the reclusive Theosophical 'warlock of the blue waters', whose authoritarian rule over El Salvador was as bizarre as it was bloodthirsty – unless you were lucky enough to have been born an ant.

Over the last two articles, we have been recalling a speech given by the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez after winning 1982's Nobel Prize for Literature in which he talked of the power held by the omnipotent military dictator, or *caudillo*, over the life and legends of Latin America. Undoubtedly, Márquez left the weirdest such dictator until last, sketching General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1882-1966) as being "the Theosophical despot of El Salvador, who had 30,000 peasants slaughtered in a savage massacre, invented a pendulum to detect poison in his food, and had streetlamps draped in red paper to defeat an epidemic of scarlet-fever."<sup>1</sup>

### PEASANT-SHOOTING SEASON

Given such a build-up, you would expect General Martínez to be better known. However, when news broke that he had been stabbed to death by his driver, Cipriano Morales, while living in exile in Honduras on 15 May 1966, most non-Salvadorans had never even heard of him. The assassin had a rather clearer memory: Morales's own father had been one of the former President's many victims. The specific trigger for the attack was that Martínez, ever the martinet, had apparently refused to pay Morales his wages that week on account of the driver being drunk, but the murder still stood as a kind of belated revenge against the retired 84-year-old dictator on behalf of an entire, traumatised nation.

Martínez came to power in 1931 as a result of a coup by El Salvador's armed forces. He already held office as Vice-President in the government of President Arturo Araujo, who had demonstrated an inept handling of the tiny nation's economy, leading to soldiers and officers not being paid. Problems had begun in 1929 with the Wall Street Crash, which led to a drop in US demand for El Salvador's main export of coffee, a crop then accounting for 90



LEFT: General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. BELOW: Feliciano Ama, the Pipil rebel leader arrested and hanged in front of local schoolchildren on Martínez's orders.

per cent of foreign income. Wages among coffee workers collapsed, as did revenue for landowners. With Communists busy agitating among the downtrodden proletariat on the coffee farms, who toiled for but a few cents per day, the army thought they had better get their own revolution in first, and installed General Martínez as the region's latest *caudillo*.

Naturally, Martínez gave the military their back-pay, but he also needed support from the influential landowning classes, whose workers were restless. When in January 1932 a major peasant rebellion finally broke out, Martínez wasted no time in consolidating his position by ordering an immediate policy of mass-murder. Anywhere between 10,000 and 30,000 "Communists" were summarily shot and dumped in mass graves during what came to be known as *La Matanza* ("The Great Slaughter"); most of them had

never even heard of Karl Marx, but all of them were only too familiar with the horrors of hunger and poverty. The peasants, armed with machetes, were no match for Martínez's machine guns and rifles, and the General took full advantage of the situation to more or less wipe out the country's troublesome native Pipil Indian population, who had joined the coffee-workers' revolt, and their supposedly 'backward' culture. Essentially this was genocide, with perhaps 2.5 per cent of El Salvador's entire population being killed in one fell swoop. Overnight, El Salvador's main industry had changed from coffee to coffins, with even women and children being shot to ensure the Indian race could never rise again. Worse, the General seemed proud of what he had done. When one Pipil rebel leader, Feliciano Ama, was taken away to be hanged, local schoolchildren were given a free outing to the lynching as a special treat on the President's orders, while photographers





captured the event for all eternity – images of the execution even later featured on the country’s postage stamps.<sup>2</sup>

## MADMAN AND THE ANTS

A strict teetotal vegetarian, the Theosophist General was often accused of caring more about the lives of animals than humans, but to him this was a totally logical stance. The often paradoxical influence of Martínez’s beliefs over his conduct is summed up in the following pithy but callous maxim given out in one of the many weekly radio speeches he delivered to the nation: “It is a greater crime to kill an ant than a man, because a man who dies is reincarnated, while an ant dies forever. By this logic, General Martínez would never hurt a fly – and he really did value the lives of his beloved ants. Prior to politics, Martínez had dabbled in farming, but ants kept eating his crops. Instead of eliminating the insects, he had the idea of planting his seeds several feet underground, well below the ants’ usual domain... and also well below the level at which crops can actually grow, thus ruining the harvest.”<sup>3</sup> His public assertions about the rights of ants were, in a twisted way, somewhat in line with Theosophical belief – the religion does preach a doctrine of reincarnation – but sceptical listeners might also have discerned certain practical political benefits to Martínez’s statements. While acting as a warning to all potential non-insect opponents that he stood ready to kill them without delay, they also simultaneously made the man behind *La Matanza* seem kinder than he really was; for was it not likely that when all those dead Indians were reborn, it would be into a better world? “Democracy,” Martínez once said, “is love” – and, as a committed democrat, the General’s love for his people was literally boundless. In 1935, he helped spread this love further by ensuring that he was the only candidate on the ballot, thus winning 100 per cent of the vote; in 1939, he simply announced that, for no apparent reason, that year’s upcoming election had unexpectedly already taken place, and that he had won by a landslide. The fact that nobody could remember voting in it was a mystery not worth exploring.

Consider also the time that *El Presidente* airily declined an offer from a well-off local American landowner to provide free



LEFT: A Pipil man marches to the Salvadoran Congress in 2013 to demand recognition of the existence of ethnic groups in El Salvador.

## “HAVE SNAKES, SPIDERS AND HORSES A SENSE OF BEAUTY?”

sandals to the many ill-shod children in the country’s underfunded schools. “It is good that children go barefoot,” he lectured the disappointed donor. “That way they can better receive the beneficial effluvia of the planet, the vibrations of the Earth. Plants and animals don’t use shoes.” Looked at this way, the poverty which prevailed across the land was really doing Martínez’s shoeless subjects a favour by boosting their health and wellbeing. “Why does a man smile to himself when he is walking down the street? Because of the power of spirit over matter,” he sermonised via the radio-waves. Other unlikely claims made by General Martínez that “the Invisible Legions follow me”, whispering word of all plots into his ear, and that he enjoyed telepathic contact with the US President, served the happy function of making his feared secret police apparatus sound even more terrifyingly efficient than it really was. On the other

hand, some of his speeches (relating to topics as diverse as “democracy, intestinal parasites, Theosophy, black magic, sport, fruit-trees, body-hygiene, World War, kidney-problems [and the] inner peace of man”, according to one account)<sup>4</sup> were so odd you suspect he meant every word of them. What, for example, could have been his ulterior motive in broadcasting his many astonishing new breakthroughs in the field of science to the world? In one such radio address, the General proudly announced his discovery of something called ‘super-vapour’, though he was quite vague about what precisely this substance was. “If water is heated, vapour results,” he explained. “What, then, would super-vapour be like? Even though you have not seen it, in reality it exists.” Sometimes, he

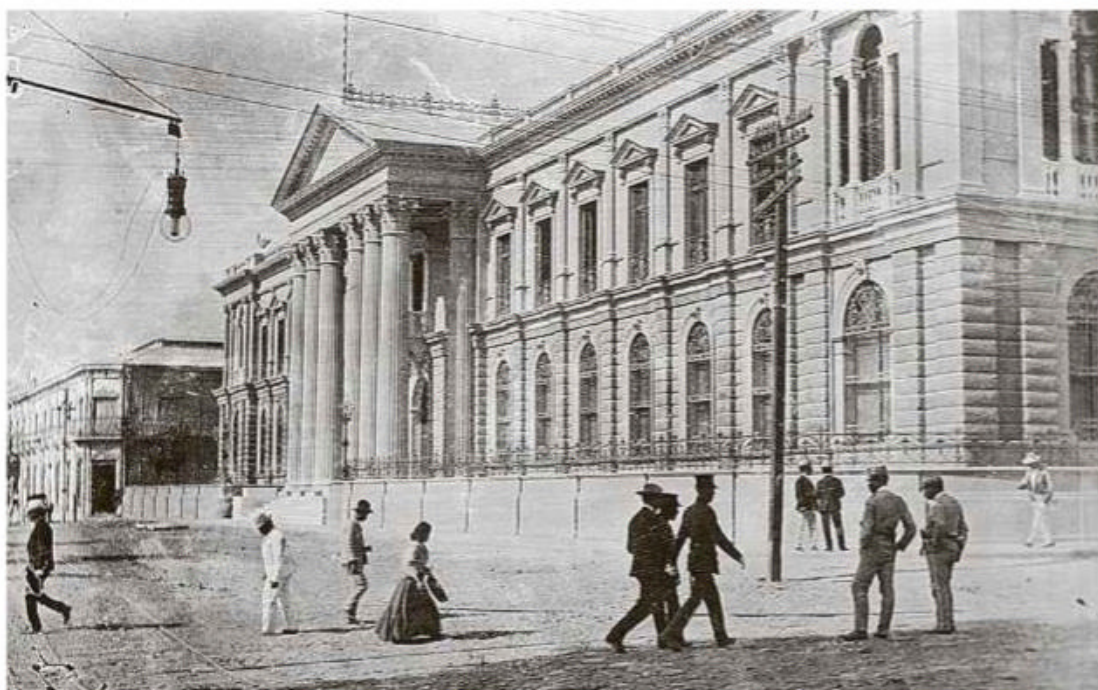
set weird, unanswerable questions, which he then proceeded to try and respond to himself, on account of his superior genius. “Have snakes, spiders, and horses a sense of beauty?” he once asked the nation, gnomically. “Biologists have only discovered five senses,” he told his listeners on another occasion, “but in reality, there are 10. Hunger, thirst, procreation, urination and bowel-movements are the senses not included in the list.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps this was because the General, again in line with Theosophist thinking, believed in the continuing evolution of the human race. In a rare interview with the travel writer John Gunther, the reclusive Martínez once explained that he was indeed an “evolutionist”, something he used to justify the fact that, in practice, he ruled El Salvador as a dictator, rather than the ‘democrat’ he posed as. He was, he insisted, “a democratic idealist”, but pointed out sadly that the majority of his own people had not yet evolved spiritually, morally or mentally enough for them to be entrusted with the freedom of real voting rights, only fake ones. “Democracy imposes obligations on citizens as well as giving them privileges,” he explained; privileges which the shoeless *Mestizos* (the mixed-race, half-Spanish, half-Indian folk who made up most of the working-class), who had





# STRANGE STATESMEN #46



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LEFT: General Martínez – not wearing glasses. ABOVE: The Presidential Palace, where the General held frequent séances. BELOW: The smiling *Mestizo* woman who appeared on a Salvadoran banknote; local legend had it that she was in fact the witch to the General's Macbeth.

evidently not yet absorbed enough positive Earth-energies through their bare feet, would not be granted.<sup>6</sup> Actually a *Mestizo* himself, you might be forgiven for thinking that the highly evolved General had a little bit of racial self-loathing hidden away somewhere within his psyche, like one of those excessively committed Nazis who later turned out to have been part-Jewish.<sup>7</sup>

## BLUE-SKY THINKER

Due to its tropical blue skies, El Salvador turned out to be a rather propitious place for further human evolution to occur, given all the positive vibes beamed down to Earth every day from above. So devoted was Martínez to sun-worshipping that he began every day by going outside and staring directly at the fiery, retina-shredding ball for several minutes at a time without blinking. Rather than making him blind, he claimed this distinctly dangerous method had helped cure his short-sightedness.<sup>8</sup> In photos, the General is rarely seen wearing glasses, so perhaps the cure worked. If so, then he had to thank the “invisible doctors” he was in contact with via the regular séances held at his Presidential Palace in San Salvador, who had given him the tip in the first place. I am unsure if these sages were meant to be the ghosts of dead medics, as in the Brazilian tradition of psychic-surgery, or else some kind of Mahatma-like ‘Hidden Master’-type beings of the kind that Theosophy’s founder, Madame Blavatsky (FT302:32-37), claimed to have been in regular psychic contact with; but whatever they were, they had a very loose attitude towards medical ethics.

Most infamously, the invisible doctors had advised *El Maestro*, as he liked to be known, upon the use of so-called *aguas azules*, or ‘blue waters’. This was ordinary water, sealed up within special bottles made of blue



glass, and then left around the courtyard of the Presidential Palace to soak up the rays of the life-giving South American sun. When filtered through the blue glass, these beneficial radiations would supposedly cause the very molecular structure of the water itself to alter in some way, lending it amazing curative qualities. No matter what ailments his acquaintances were suffering from – including cancer – Martínez would offer them bottles of his famed blue waters instead of actual medicine, a panacea he also promoted on his radio show. If any underlings wanted to stay in favour, they had to swallow the Master’s home-made pills and potions, no matter how bitter. Some people were only too happy to do so; in 2009, Martínez’s 96-year-old sister-in-law gave an interview in which she credited her

long life to drinking fluids from magic blue receptacles. Because of such follies, the so-called *Maestro* actually became known to his people as *el brujo de las aguas azules*, or ‘the warlock of the blue waters’. Martínez himself was totally sincere in his belief that blue really was the colour. When his youngest son was dying from appendicitis, he refused point-blank to let surgeons anywhere near him, instead following the ghost-doctors’ advice to give the boy plenty to drink and let nature take its course. When the poor lad later died screaming in agony, his father refused to admit the foolishness of his actions. Mere humans “must not intervene in the impenetrable designs of nature,” he shrugged, an assessment with which his furious wife did not necessarily agree. Very soon, the sound of smashing blue glass could be heard echoing all across the Presidential Palace.

Martínez’s attitude towards major public health crises was equally colourful. When a smallpox (or scarlet-fever or measles, in some accounts) epidemic broke out across San Salvador, his idea of a ‘cure’ was to set up the strangest Red Light Zone of all time. Rejecting all offers of medical aid, and scorning proven modern methods of preventing further spread of the disease, Martínez ordered that all the street-lamps in the city be covered with sheets of red cellophane, in order to “purify the environment” and kill off all the lurking germs – an insane measure that cannot have improved the General’s standing with his public, no matter what rose-tinted explanations he later offered.<sup>9</sup> The ultimate source of Martínez’s beliefs would have been books by quack ‘doctors’ like General Augustus J Pleasonton’s 1876 *The Influence of the Blue Ray of the Sunlight and the Blue Color of the Sky* (published on





LEFT: In 1992, Salvadoran guerillas lay a wreath of flowers on the grave of rebel leader Farabundo Martí to mark the 60th anniversary of massacre of some 30,000 peasants by General Martínez's army in 1932.

blue paper for extra therapeutic effect) and Dr Seth Pancoast's imitative *Blue and Red Light: Or, Light and Its Rays as Medicine* (printed in blue ink with a red page-border in 1877). Pancoast himself was a notable early Theosophist, directly acquainted with Madame Blavatsky herself.<sup>10</sup>

## THE PENDULUM SWINGS

There can be no doubt that such deadly lunacy on their leader's part helped turn the people of El Salvador against the so-called 'Machine-Gun Theosophist'. As time passed, Martínez began taking the concept of limited government to its limits, spending days locked away inside the labyrinthine Presidential Palace and messing about with a supposed 'magic' pendulum. Before each meal, he would dangle his device over his food and observe its movements, thus evaluating its natural vitamin content and testing it for poison. At other times, he would swing it over maps, hunting out the locations of buried treasure and soon-to-be-buried political opponents.<sup>11</sup>

Martínez's earlier rule did feature some achievements, of sorts. He got the public finances on a sound footing. He eliminated the national debt, slashed inflation, established El Salvador's first Central Bank, ran a surplus, and made the currency strong again... all while underfunding public-services and letting the poor go hang. Even these financial feats were sullied by rumours of sorcery, with a *Macbeth*-like legend arising that the *Mestizo* woman formerly depicted on the country's 5 colónes banknote was, in fact, a witch whom Martínez had once consulted to see if his coup would really succeed. She said it would, giving him the courage to proceed. Years later, he was meant to have returned to the Weird Sister and asked

her to name her reward; inexplicably, she decided what she wanted above all else was to be depicted on a banknote. The note in question shows a generic smiling peasant-woman carrying a basket of fruit on her head, so I doubt the tale is true.<sup>12</sup>

What is true is that by 1944, when Martínez announced that he felt like staying in power for another term unopposed, his people were furious. He put down one attempted revolt by violent means, so the population tried a different tack and everyone from dentists to theatre technicians simply stayed at home in what became known as 'The Strike of Fallen Arms'. With nobody out on the streets to actually shoot or arrest, Martínez's forces – just about the only employees who had turned up for work – were unsure what to do. One daring newspaper began printing ridiculously untrue but undeniably positive headlines about Martínez's rule, such as "WATER SO PLENTIFUL IN VILLAGES THAT IT FLOWS IN VERITABLE CASCADES", which the censors felt unable to criticise even though everyone was laughing at them, making *El Maestro* seem even more ridiculous. The editor was shot and wounded as a warning, but it did no good. Eventually, a humiliated Martínez agreed to step down and sought refuge in neighbouring Guatemala, whose own dictator, Jorge Ubico, had attended military college with the General.<sup>13</sup> However, Ubico was also soon overthrown by popular demand, and Martínez had to flee first to the USA, and then to Honduras, where he died a deserved death in 1966, after sustaining a series of knife-wounds not even his remaining supplies of mystical blue water could salve – a case of 'Magician, heal thyself!'

## NOTES

My main source was the chapter 'Sharpshooting Theosophist' in William Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean in the 1940s*, Lugus Libros, 1999, pp.3-17. Any un referenced details or quotes taken from here.

**1** Speech at [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/martinez-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/martinez-lecture.html); General Martínez was one of the models for the ageing composite *caudillo*-figure depicted by Márquez in his novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*.

**2** Krehm, 1999, pp.7-8; Roy Boland, *Culture and Customs of El Salvador*, Greenwood Press, 2001, pp.26-27; <https://perezia.wordpress.com/2016/05/09/teosofia-genocidio-y-aguas-azules/>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1932\\_Salvadoran\\_peasant\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1932_Salvadoran_peasant_massacre). Such violent excesses led to Martínez's memory being resurrected during the Salvadoran Civil War of 1979-1992 by a far-right paramilitary death-squad calling themselves the 'General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Brigade'.

**3** Krehm, 1999, p.7

**4** <https://perezia.wordpress.com/2016/05/09/teosofia-genocidio-y-aguas-azules/>

**5** Quotes taken from Robert Armstrong & Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, South End Press, 1982, p.26; Eduardo Galleano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Monthly Review Press, 1997, p.111; Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Kristofer Ching & Rafael Lara Martínez, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932*, University of New Mexico Press, 2007, p.283; Krehm, 1999, pp.3-17.

**6** John Gunther, *Inside Latin America*, Harper & Bros, 1941, pp.126-7.

**7** Martínez has sometimes been labelled a fascist, but this is not quite accurate. He certainly admired Hitler *et al*, but once it became clear that the US under Roosevelt would adopt an anti-fascist line, Martínez wasted no time in cosying up to Uncle Sam, expelling the German and Italian ambassadors and issuing a declaration of war against the Axis nations, resulting in valuable US loans. See Boland, 2001, p.27.

**8** Gunther, 1941, p.126; the original source of this belief was American quack-optometrist WH Bates, author of 1920's *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*.

**9** Lindo-Fuentes, Ching & Martínez, 2007, p.283; Raul Ernesto Moreno Campos, *Reframing Salvadoran Modernity*, 2015 UCLA thesis, pp.161-2, online at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/45n3k5n0#page-172>; This last source has much material relating to how membership of the local Theosophist 'Teotl Lodge' was more or less an obligatory condition for being accepted into El Salvador's political class at the time. It appears Martínez took the esoteric teachings of this networking club more seriously than most members, seeing his dictatorship as a "cosmically ordained" means of maintaining holy order and protecting the land from Communism, thereby allowing his people to evolve into a higher state of being (see pp.158-189).

**10** Martin Gardner, *Fads & Fallacies in the Name of Science*, Dover Books, 1957, p.212; <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/col.21862/full>; [www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/cured-colour](http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/cured-colour); [http://theosophy.wiki/en/Seth\\_Pancoast](http://theosophy.wiki/en/Seth_Pancoast)

**11** Krehm, 1999, p.9.

**12** Krehm, 1999, pp.10-11; Boland, 2001, pp.27-8; <http://pearlsintheeternity.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/war-in-el-salvador-1980-1992-was-one.html>; <http://www.banknotes.com/sv82.htm>

**13** Krehm, 1999, pp.12-17; <http://hvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/el-salvadorans-bring-down-dictator-1944>; <http://archive.is/Cuta#selection-1081.0-1425.1>



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## The Man from Taured

**JULIA LOUIS** turns online fortean detective to solve a long-running mystery

There are some mysteries that will probably never be solved: What happened aboard the *Mary Celeste*? Who was DB Cooper? What occurred at the Flannan Isles lighthouse? However, some mysteries can be solved with just a computer and an inquiring mind.

You may have come across 'The Man from Taured' on the Internet, the tale of a mysterious traveller seemingly not quite of this world: In 1954 a man arrives on a flight into Tokyo airport. He presents his passport, but the immigration officials are baffled – they have never heard of Taured, its country of issue. Asked to locate it on a map, the passenger points to the tiny principality of Andorra, and mentions that his country has been in existence for over 2,000 years. He is insistent that the name of the country is Taured, not Andorra, and that it has never had any other name. The baffled officials put him in a hotel room for the night, with police downstairs. In the morning, the room is empty and there is no trace of the 'Man from Taured'. Was he a temporary visitor from an alternative universe where Andorra is named Taured?

I'm a member of an online fortean forum. As I am somewhat disabled, my research mostly takes place in my home office. When I read about the 'Man From Taured' I sensed that this was a case that could be solved with online resources. I've been experimenting with Internet search terms for years, which has taught me to tweak and tinker with research inputs. Using various spellings, mis-spellings, plus/minus this-or-that word often drops a precious nugget of information into one's virtual lap.



The first piece of the puzzle, confirming the story may have been based on an actual event, came from the Hansard record of the UK Parliament, 29 July 1960 (vol. 627). Robert Mathew, MP for Honiton, was speaking about the relative security value of passports: "My hon. Friend may know the case of John Alan Zegrus, who is at present being prosecuted in Tokyo. In evidence, he describes himself as an intelligence agent for Colonel Nasser and a naturalised Ethiopian. This man, according to the evidence, has travelled all over the world with a very impressive looking passport indeed. It is written in a language unknown and it has remained unidentified although it has been studied for a long time by philologists.

The passport is stated to have been issued in Tamanrosset the capital of the independent sovereign State of Tuarid. Neither the country nor the language can be identified, although a great deal of time has been spent in the attempt. When the accused was cross-examined he said that it was a State of 2 million population somewhere south of the Sahara. This man has been round the world on this passport without hindrance, a passport which as far as we know is written in the invented language of an invented country. I would stress, therefore, that passports are not very good security checks."

This alternative spelling of 'Taured' as Tuarid, the location of the incident being named as Tokyo and the validity of the source put me onto a possible trail. The date was curious: 1960 – six years later than given in the stories. I wondered if the date of 1954 was erroneous and concentrated my

research on the range 1958-1962.

I then turned up this curious little press clipping from the *Province* newspaper of Vancouver, British Columbia, dated 15 Aug 1960, about the man from 'Tuared' (note the variation in spelling). It adds some extra context about the sojourner's modus operandi and the most useful piece of information so far. A name!

It's a curious one: John Alan/Allen Kuchar Zegrus. 'Kuchar' is perhaps eastern European or Slavic in origin and 'Zegrus' is vanishingly rare as a surname. So rare in fact, that I was able to narrow it down to an individual mentioned in two separate US intelligence documents from 1960 and 1961. Both were published under the title of 'Daily Report Foreign Radio Broadcasts by US Government agencies'. These documents – digests of contemporary radio news bulletins from Asia – provide evidence that a Mr JAK Zegrus was indeed apprehended on arrival at Tokyo airport in 1959. He carried an unusual, home-made passport he'd used on his globe-trotting adventure; now his journey ended with his arrest. When his case was heard on 10 August 1960 and he was found guilty, the man attempted suicide in the courtroom with a concealed weapon, according to the Daily Report Issue 156-160 of 1960. There is then a gap of over a year in the sources before Mr Zegrus crops up again. On 22 December 1961 he was sentenced to one year in jail; and from that point the online trail goes cold.

It's interesting to note how a simple transposition of an 'a' and a 'u' and a shifting of the date backwards to 1954 has resulted in a minor myth of the online age being born, alongside the almost total erasure of the real man.

All current mentions of the story seem to have as their source the *Directory of Possibilities* (1981) by Paul Begg (co-edited by Colin Wilson and John Grant). It's a scant reference, scarcely more

than a line on p.86, giving the date of 1954, the man's appearance at Tokyo airport and the country of 'Taured'.

The detail of his 'passport' being issued at Tamanrasset and the issuing country being Tuared does bring to mind North African associations inherent in the name of the similarly-named Tuareg peoples. Tamanrasset (variously spelled Tamanghasset or Tamenghest) is the name of a province and city in Algeria and Mr Zegrus is mentioned in Hansard as a self-described Ethiopian, but the mystery passenger's given name while in custody seems to be an odd combination of American and eastern European.

Arguably, the real events are weirder than the original story. Who was John Allen/Allan/Alan Kuchar Zegrus? Where was he from? How many countries had he bluffed his way into? Where did go after his jail time in Japan? The CIA radio broadcast report documents tell us he was a stateless yet 'self-styled' American – very odd terminology. Mr Zegrus professed to work for both the FBI and Colonel Nasser of Egypt. Was he a Walter Mitty-style fantasist with some kind of psychological condition or did he indeed have clandestine service connections? The report of his suicide attempt does hint that he was in mental distress, but beyond that we cannot speculate. Unless further information about Mr Kuchar Zegrus comes to light we can trace his path no further, and the mystery of the man from Tuared remains; but we can now confidently say that the riddle of the mythical 'Man from Taured' has been well and truly solved.

♦ JULIA LOUIS has been fascinated by mysteries from an early age. Her interests include plant sciences, horticulture, IT, ceramics, early British history and the cultures of South Asia. When not travelling to Nepal and India, she lives in Somerset.



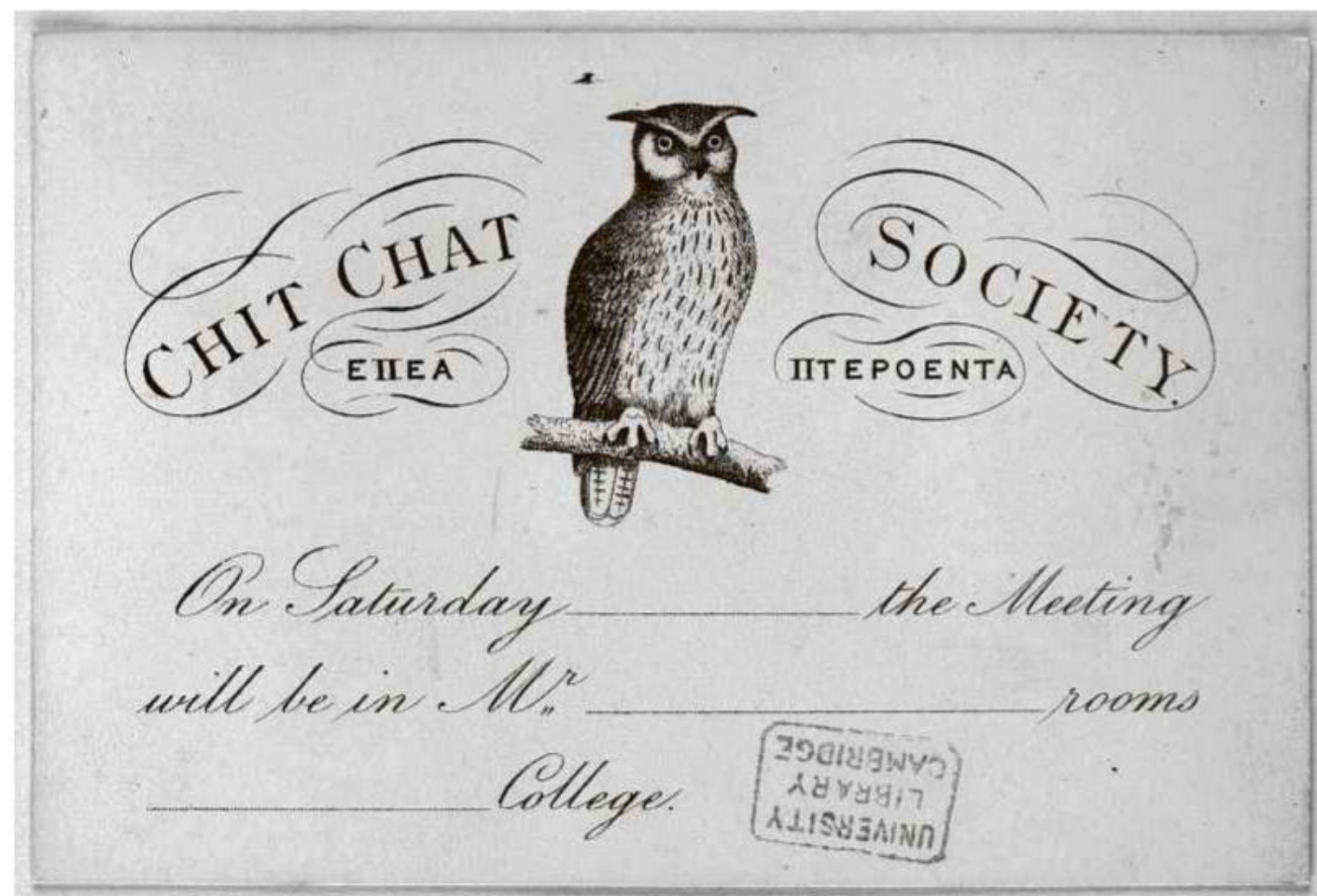
## The Chit-Chat Club

**ROBERT LLOYD PARRY** looks at the origins and output of an obscure and exclusive Cambridge University society that was transformed by the membership of MR James

**O**n the surface there's little fortean-sounding about The Chit-Chat Club, a Cambridge University society founded in the mid 19th century for "the promotion of rational conversation". The club came into being in 1860 when Robert Francillon and Alsager Hay-Hill, two law undergraduates at Trinity Hall, established a routine to enliven those slow term-time weekends. They and 13 like-minded friends, it was decided, would meet in each other's rooms at 9pm every Saturday, to read aloud and discuss original papers on literary, historic and philosophical subjects.

The titles of some of the papers offered in those early years, preserved in a set of minute books in Cambridge University Library, give an idea of the tenor of the meetings and the interests of the club's members: "On the Practice and Qualification of a Historian"; "On some causes which led to the French Revolution of 1789"; "Yeast". The club's symbol was an owl – a playful reference perhaps to Francillon's childhood pet, Jacob, but also surely an allusion to Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Its motto was in ancient Greek, a stock phrase from Homer that translates as 'winged words'. The Chit-Chat was, in short, classically educated, intellectually self-confident, and rather pleased with itself.

When in 1883 Montague Rhodes James (see **FT292:30-37, 387:34-39**) came up to Cambridge



**ABOVE:** An invitation to a Chit-Chat meeting c.1880. **BELOW:** The undergraduate M R James joined the Society in 1883.

as an undergraduate he noted its reputation for earnest exclusivity. "I am going to an institution called the Chit-Chat," he wrote to his father. "It is not a large society at all, only about 11 people, and the subjects terrible deep sometimes..."

During James's 14-year membership, however, the atmosphere of the club subtly and gradually changed. Intellectual standards remained high and, if anything, the exclusivity increased; but the prevailing tone changed – softened, perhaps. The "terrible" depth was over time replaced by what critics described as "a frivolous solemnity", as James, the de facto leader of the club, promoted his own preoccupations with historical and literary curiosities and the less frequented byways of antiquarian research. When he delivered a paper – and he spoke on 21 occasions, more than any other member in the club's history – obscurity was celebrated. His

*"It is not a large society and the subjects terrible deep sometimes"*



first address, entitled "Useless Knowledge", was a kind of sorry-not-sorry defence of his niche academic interests. And more detail of those interests emerged in subsequent papers: "Art Magic" in 1884, and "The Grotesque" in 1885.

James spoke regularly about strange and marvellous stories: "The Beginnings of Christian Fiction", delivered in 1885, was probably a layman's introduction to his pioneering work on the New Testament Apocrypha, the 'damned data' of early Christendom. In 1893 he spoke about his favourite writer of the supernatural, Sheridan Le Fanu, and he shared his lifelong interests in hagiography and religious marvels with talks on Cæsarius of Heisterbach, the author of a 13th century compilation of miracle tales, in 1889, and on the boy-martyr, St William of Norwich, in 1891.

The paper that would perhaps have appealed to *Fortean Times*





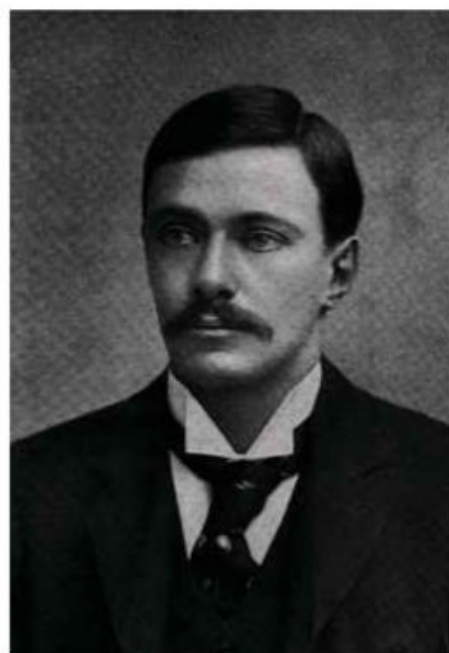
readers the most came in 1892, when James offered his thoughts on Walter Map, the 12th century author of *De Nugis Curialium* – ‘Courtiers’ Trifles’ – a compendium of curious tales and extraordinary ‘true’ events. Many of Map’s marvels are classical or folkloric, but he takes pleasure too in recounting contemporary phenomena, like Nicholas Pipe ‘the Man of the Sea’, “that prodigy... surpassing all wonderment... [who] for long periods, a month or a year... would frequent the depths of the sea with the fishes, without breathing the air...” James would translate *De Nugis Curialium* into English in 1923, but the book had fascinated him since he first came across it as a schoolboy in the library at Eton.

The furthest limits of rational conversation, however, were reached at the Chit-Chat’s 601st meeting on 28 October 1893, when the minute book tells us “Mr James read two ghost stories.” This is the earliest record we have of James reading his supernatural tales aloud, and the two that he offered the club that night – “Lost Hearts” and “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” – have become cornerstones of supernatural literature.

James’s enthusiasm for the curious, the irrational, the entertainingly supernatural, influenced his fellow Chit-Chat members. In 1884 Herbert Tatham, an old schoolfriend, addressed the club on “Ghosts”. We don’t know the precise content of this talk but, given the date and the author’s Cambridge affiliations, it seems likely that it was connected with the foundation two years earlier of the Society for Psychical Research, whose first president, Henry Sidgwick, was a prominent senior member of Tatham’s college, Trinity.

James’s influence can also be felt in the later literary output of his Chit-Chat contemporaries, several of whom went on to publish ghost stories of their own.

Tatham and Arthur Benson, who on leaving Cambridge both took up teaching posts at Eton, would entertain their pupils on Sunday evenings with morally



ABOVE: EF Benson (left) and RH Benson, James’s fellow Chit-Chat members.

improving tales which often took a supernatural turn, and the works of both men were published in the early 1900s. Arthur Benson’s brother EF Benson, perhaps the Chit-Chat’s most entertaining chronicler, was present at the influential 601st meeting, and in later life was frank about his undergraduate fealty to MR James. Several of the – justly admired – ‘spook tales’ that he published throughout his life show his hero’s influence, most notably perhaps “The Other Bed” (1908) which offers a more than casual nod towards James’s most famous ghost story “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” (1903). It was the youngest Benson brother, however, who was perhaps the most forteen-minded Chit-Chat member of all.

When RH Benson – Hugh to his friends and family – was five years old, one of his godfathers visited the family home with a gift for his young ward. His older brother, Arthur, recalled the occasion: “After luncheon, Hugh, in a little black velvet suit, entered the room, and said with his little stammer: ‘Tha-a-ank you, Godpapa, for this beautiful Bible! Will you read me some of it?’ ‘And what shall I read about?’ ‘The de-e-evil!’ said Hugh without the least hesitation.”

This strange child grew up to be a strange man. A devout, if restless, Christian, his interest in and relish for matters demonological and paranormal lasted long into adulthood. After

an undistinguished schoolboy career at Eton, he went up to Cambridge in 1890, and followed his two brothers into the Chit-Chat. James was present in Hugh’s rooms in 1892, and doubtless listened with interest, as the host addressed the club on the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg, the 18th century Christian mystic and philosopher (see FT220:40-45) whose writings underlie several of Sheridan Le Fanu’s tales. James and Benson also shared an interest in the Elizabethan occultist John Dee (see FT328:12-13).

But unlike James, Hugh’s fascination with alternative spiritual traditions and the paranormal was practical as well as intellectual. As an undergraduate he experimented with hypnotism, Spiritualism, and “crystal gazing.” And another Chit-Chat member, Robert Carr Bosanquet, recalled a not-altogether successful investigation into telepathy: “So far as I can remember, half a dozen of us in one room were told to focus our thoughts on the weather-cock on the University church, and after a time the medium in the next room, was aware of a cow [sic] perched on a steeple.”

The son of an Archbishop of Canterbury, Benson followed his father into the Anglican church after leaving Cambridge, then shocked friends and family by converting to Roman Catholicism. And it was while he was training

for the priesthood in Rome that he began writing the supernatural tales that were collected in 1907 as *A Mirror of Shalott*. Set in the fictional Canadian Church of San Filippo in Rome, the book presents a circle of storytelling priests of various nationalities who, over a number of evenings, tell each other ‘true’ tales of the marvellous from their ministries, tales of “a spiritual world... crammed full of energy and movement and affairs.” James later dismissed these stories as “too ecclesiastical”, and indeed Benson sets out frankly to look at how far “supernatural” occurrences can be taken as corroborative of Christian belief. As one of the priestly narrators says, “My religion teaches me that there is a spiritual world of indefinite size, and that things not only may, but must, go on there which have nothing particular to do with me.” The collected tales tell of a number of intrusions of this spiritual realm into the material world.

When in 1897 the Chit-Chat Club, in James’s words, “expired of inanition”, Charles Fort was a young, struggling short story writer in New York City, several years from conceiving the books and compilations of phenomena that would one day transform his name into an adjective. As individuals, members of the Chit-Chat mightn’t have had much in common with the author of *The Book of the Damned* and *Lo!*, but some of them at least, shared and occasionally examined, in talk and in print, his view that the world was a stranger place than many of their fellow establishment figures were prepared to accept.



*Ghosts of the Chit-Chat*, an anthology of supernatural tales written by members of the Chit-Chat Club is published by Swan

River Press. [www.swanriverpress.ie/](http://www.swanriverpress.ie/)

✦ ROBERT LLOYD PARRY is a performance storyteller and writer. In 2005 he began his ‘M R James Project’, which has encompassed one man shows, films, several documentaries and audiobooks, a guided walk and an FT article.



## Misleading obfuscation

**PETER A McCUE** laments the habit displayed by numerous writers on strange phenomena of withholding or changing vital names and locations

**A**lthough there's nothing inherently disreputable about having strange experiences, informants sometimes request that case details, such as their names, be kept confidential. That's often understandable and appropriate. But taken too far, 'anonymisation' can reduce witness testimony to little more than vague rumour. Some speakers and writers seem to change names as a matter of course, perhaps doing so without even bothering to tell their listeners or readers ('silent pseudonymisation'). Others display a lamentable degree of laziness, by stating that *some* names have been changed, but without specifying which. Of course, these practices aren't conducive to clarity, historical accuracy or independent verification of reported events.

In January 1975, the *Glasgow Herald* carried a report on a poltergeist case involving two council flats, one above the other, in the Balornock district of Glasgow. The newspaper named the street, Northgate Quadrant, and the occupants of the flats, the Keenan family (mother, father and son) and the Grieve family (mother, father, two sons and Mrs Grieve's mother)<sup>1</sup>. The article included a photograph of the Keenans, who lived in the lower flat.

Archie Roy (1924-2012), who became a professor of astronomy in 1977, was a Glasgow-based psychical researcher. He became involved in the Balornock case in early 1975. The phenomena weren't confined to Northgate Quadrant. For example, poltergeist



*A loud bump was followed by inexplicable noises*

activity followed the Grieves to the home of Mrs Grieve's sister and her husband, three-quarters of a mile away. Roy himself witnessed phenomena in the Grieves' flat and included a slightly muddled account of the case in his 1990 book *A Sense of Something Strange*.<sup>2</sup> He explained that he'd used pseudonyms for the participants – except for himself and a co-investigator, the Reverend Max Magee. One might wonder why he bothered to change

names that were already in the public domain. But at least he acknowledged that he'd done so. Regrettably, though, he *didn't* say that he'd also changed the name of the principal location, Balornock. Misleadingly, his chapter on the case is titled "The house at Maxwell Park". There is, in fact, a Maxwell Park in Glasgow. It's an actual park, not a housing scheme, and it's located on the south side of the city, in a salubrious district called Pollokshields, which is very different from working class Balornock on the north side of Glasgow. (I can't be sure, but it may be that Roy alighted on the place name 'Maxwell Park' because his colleague was Max Magee.)

Maybe Roy didn't intend to deceive – perhaps he simply 'forgot' to say that he'd changed the name of the place. However, interviewed in 2008, he was still referring to it as Maxwell Park.<sup>3</sup> Even if he felt there was a legitimate reason not to mention Balornock, he didn't need to lie. He could have simply referred to the location as Glasgow. Or he could have refrained from giving any place name at all.

The Balornock case involved multiple witnesses. According to most sources, the phenomena began in early November 1974. However, the late James McHarg, a psychiatrist with an interest in the paranormal, who visited the Grieves on three occasions, stated that the first manifestation was

**LEFT:** Northgate Quadrant in the Balornock district of Glasgow. **BELOW:** The Keenan family, who lived in one of the flats affected by poltergeist activity.

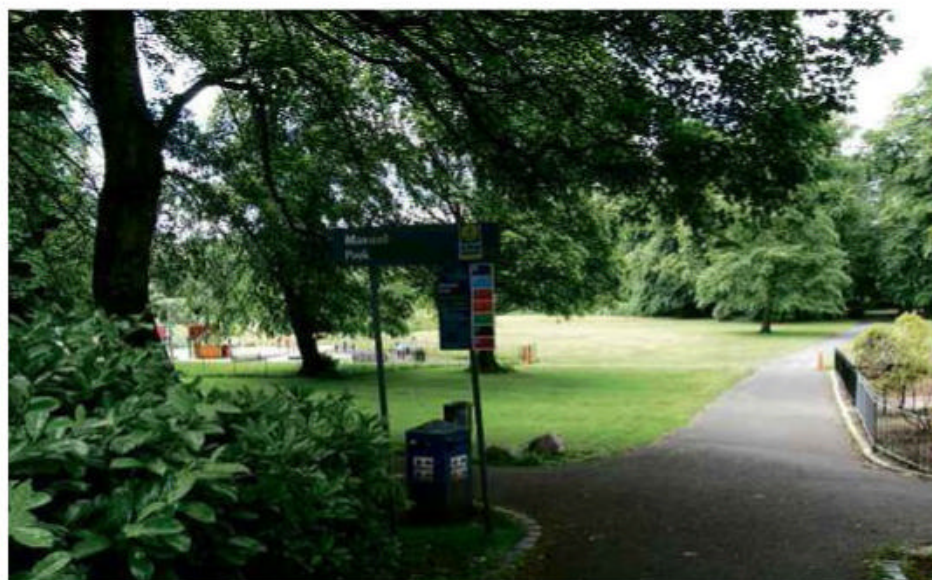
a loud bump, occurring about 11pm one night in August or September 1974. It was reportedly followed, for about an hour, by further inexplicable noises.<sup>4</sup> The disturbances (noises, displacement of household objects, electrical problems, etc.) continued, intermittently, into the summer of 1975, or possibly a little later, finally ending after Derek Grieve, who was then 15, had achieved his ambition of obtaining an apprenticeship as an electrician. He seemed to have been the focus of much of the activity.

There's a reasonably clear and detailed account of the case in Geoff Holder's well researched book *Poltergeist over Scotland*. It gives the true location of the principal events and the real names of the main participants.<sup>5</sup> However, wittingly or not, others have perpetuated the myth that the main locus was Maxwell Park. For example, in his book *The Unbelievable Truth*, the Glasgow-born medium Gordon Smith, who'd been a friend of Archie Roy's, discusses the case.<sup>6</sup> Under the heading "Maxwell Park", he draws on Roy's account (not entirely accurately), using the same pseudonyms. He states that the paranormal goings-on involved a house in the area where he (Smith) was brought up. Of course, this gives the false impression that Smith was raised near Maxwell Park – in fact, he was brought up in Balornock.

In a 2013 book, Tricia Robertson, another former associate of Roy's, describes the "Maxwell Park case", again drawing heavily on Roy's chapter.<sup>7</sup> In fact, nearly all of what she says about the case is taken verbatim from it. But she gives no indication that the main events actually occurred in Balornock.

In an online article in the lead-





PHOTOS: PETER MCCUE

**ABOVE LEFT:** Maxwell Park – no poltergeists here! **ABOVE RIGHT:** Newton of Falkirk in Fife – the real location of a series of UFO-type events in 1996.

up to Hallowe'en in 2018, Dawn Renton of the *Glasgow South and Eastwood Extra* referred to “the poltergeist of Pollokshields”.<sup>8</sup> I presume that she was duped by Roy's false claim about the location. Similarly, referring to the case in an online article in 2013, Jason Stroming also gave the locale as Maxwell Park.<sup>9</sup> I imagine that he, too, was deceived by Roy's misleading portrayal of the case.

When people come to psychical research with an established scientific background, it may seem to bestow respectability on the subject. Archie Roy's status as a professor has no doubt increased the perceived credibility of his writings on paranormal matters. Certainly, I think he enjoyed being lionised by his psychical research colleagues, although it's worth noting that he did make a substantial contribution to the subject, as well as to astronomy. Therefore, with regard to the Balornock case, it's regrettable that he blotted his copybook by engaging in unnecessary and misleading obfuscation. Naturally, it makes one wonder whether he misrepresented other cases as well.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Ballechin House, a supposedly haunted property in rural Scotland, was rented for a period on behalf of the recently formed Society for Psychical Research (see **FT345:18-20, 394:19**). It was located some three miles to the south of Pitlochry, in Perthshire. The renting was financed by John Crichton-Stuart, the third Marquess of Bute, although the house was

taken in the name of one of the investigators, a Colonel Taylor. The aim was for investigators and house guests to log and examine any ongoing phenomena. The investigation extended over more than three months, between February and May 1897, and the manifestations were predominantly auditory – knockings, clanging sounds, footsteps, etc. A woman called Ada Goodrich-Freer was prominent in the investigation. She and Lord Bute went on to publish a book about the case, *The Alleged Haunting of B-House*, the second edition of which was published in 1900.<sup>10</sup> The rendering of 'Ballechin' as 'B' is by no means the only contraction: the book is packed with them ('Miss A', 'Father H', 'Mr Q', etc.). Fortunately, the psychical researcher Harry Price (1881-1948) managed to decode many of them.<sup>11</sup> He noted that most of the names had been aired in the letters section of the *Times* newspaper before the book was published.

The Ballechin House case has been compared to that of Borley Rectory in Essex. Both courted controversy and, like Borley Rectory, Ballechin House no longer exists – it was finally demolished in 1963.

Does it matter if the actual location of paranormal or UFO events is withheld or obscured? I would say that knowing where such things have happened may be essential for properly understanding them. For one thing, environmental factors, such as geological faulting, underground

streams or the proximity of electricity power lines, could have a bearing on the manifestations.

Take, for example, a case from Fife, in eastern Scotland. It involved a series of alleged UFO-type events on the evening of 23 September 1996, possibly extending into the very early part of the 24th.<sup>12</sup> By his own admission, Malcom Robinson, one of the principal investigators, lied to the press about the location, stating that it was near Kennoway, some miles from where the main events had actually occurred.<sup>13</sup> His investigation group had guaranteed the witnesses anonymity, and he reportedly gave the wrong location to ensure that no one from the press would have been able to find them by “snooping” in the relevant area. But instead of lying about it, he could have simply refrained from naming the locality. The main events in this case seem to have occurred on the eastern fringe of a hamlet called Newton of Falkland. Interestingly, power lines cross the B936 road there. I can't say for sure that magnetic fields associated with them played a role in the witnesses' experiences, but it's something worth bearing in mind. Of course, this possibly relevant environmental factor might have escaped notice if the actual location hadn't come to light.

*With thanks to David T Muir*

#### NOTES

**1** John McKinlay, 'Noises in the night – and the suspect is a spirit', *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan 1975, p.7.

**2** Archie Roy, *A Sense of Something*

*Strange, Dog & Bone*, 1990, pp.210-221.

**3** Michael Tymn, 'Remembering Professor Archie Roy (1924-2012)'; [http://whitecrowbooks.com/michaeltymn/entry/remembering\\_professor\\_archie\\_roy\\_1924\\_2012](http://whitecrowbooks.com/michaeltymn/entry/remembering_professor_archie_roy_1924_2012).

**4** James H McHarg, 'A poltergeist case from Glasgow'. In JD Morris, WG Roll & RL Morris (eds), *Research in Parapsychology* 1976, Scarecrow Press, 1977, pp.13-15.

**5** Geoff Holder, *Poltergeist over Scotland*, The History Press, 2013, pp.158-166. (NB: Holder mistakenly refers to James McHarg as “Peter McHarg”.)

**6** Gordon Smith, *The Unbelievable Truth*, Hay House, 2015, pp.87-91.

**7** Tricia J Robertson, *Things You Can Do When You're Dead: True Accounts of After Death Communication*, White Crow Books, 2013, pp.44-55.

**8** [www.glasgowsouthandeastwoodextra.co.uk/lifestyle/the-poltergeist-of-pollokshields-1-4820148](http://www.glasgowsouthandeastwoodextra.co.uk/lifestyle/the-poltergeist-of-pollokshields-1-4820148)

**9** Jason Stroming, 'More Glasgow hauntings'. [www.theoccultsection.com/2013/04/15/more-glasgow-hauntings/](http://www.theoccultsection.com/2013/04/15/more-glasgow-hauntings/)

**10** A Goodrich-Freer & John, Marquess of Bute (eds), *The Alleged Haunting of B-House*, C Arthur Pearson Ltd, 1900.

**11** Harry Price, *Poltergeist: Tales of the Supernatural*, Bracken Books, 1993, pp.220-228 (originally published in 1945 as *Poltergeist over England*).

**12** Peter A McCue, *Britain's Paranormal Forests: Encounters in the Woods*, History Press, 2019, Chapter 5.

**13** Malcolm Robinson, *UFO Case Files of Scotland: Amazing Real Life Alien Encounters*, privately published, 2017, p.269.

♦ **PETER A MCCUE** is a retired clinical psychologist with a longstanding interest in forteen phenomena. He is the author of *Britain's Paranormal Forests* (History Press, 2019). He lives in Scotland.



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## A devil of a character

The Devil is something of a misunderstood figure, finds **Ted Harrison** in this scholarly tour-de-force; most of what we ‘know’ about him is mediæval fantasy

### The Devil and His Advocates

Erik Butler

Reaktion Books 2021

Hb, 272pp, £20, ISBN 9781789143737

Lucifer, Beelzebub, Mephistopheles, Old Nick... he goes by many names in many myths and the image of the evil archfiend with horns and forked tail is well ingrained in the public psyche. He embodies the dark side of human nature and represents the existence of evil in the world.

Yet might the Devil be a somewhat maligned figure, in need of a PR makeover? Yale researcher Erik Butler considers the idea in *The Devil and his Advocates*. He delves into a wide variety of sources, starting with the Bible, continuing through the superstitious years of the mediæval era into Gothic iconography and hard rock music to suggest we might have got the Devil all wrong.

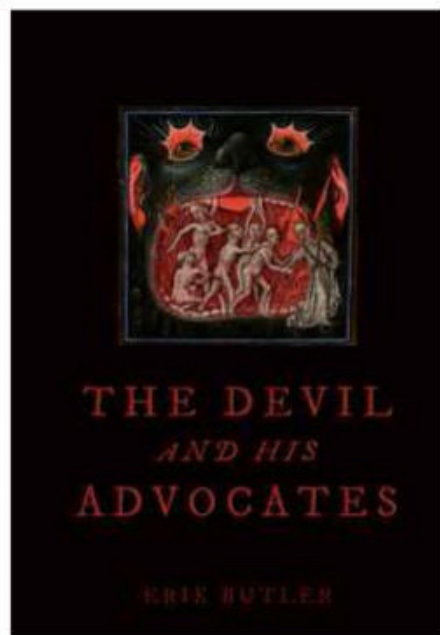
The diabolical fallen angel might not be one of the good guys. He's not the embodiment of all evil either, but a rather misunderstood figure. In his malevolent way he serves a divine purpose: he is the tempter whose job it is to test the resolve of the holy.

In the Book of Job he provokes the unfortunate Job in the most extreme ways, but Job never cracks under the pressure and despite poverty, boils and bereavement remains obedient to God. Similarly in the New Testament it is Satan's role to goad Jesus in the wilderness with visions of food when he is fasting, and wealth and worldly power. "Get behind me, Satan," orders Jesus as he passes the test with flying colours.

On the other hand, Satan all too often wins the moral tussle, as the 16th-century story of Faust

illustrates. Faust is rewarded for agreeing to serve Satan, in the form of Mephistopheles, but pays a high price. When his period of indenture is over he is found in his chamber beaten to a pulp with blood and brains spattered across the walls. A warning to all.

The existence of a supernatural prince of darkness lording it over a malodorous sulphur pit where the damned are tortured for eternity is not a Christian view, at least not one based on biblical sources. This idea of Hell is an amalgamation of paganism, folklore, misunderstood scripture and human anxiety. The Devil is a synthesis of disconnected sources from Scripture, remnants of pre-Christian superstition and our own response to inner "demons".



Yet, by the 14th century in Europe, Hell had developed its own geography and in Dante's *Divine Comedy* there is even a kind of imaginary map describing Hell, Purgatory and Heaven placed in ascending order. The underworld is vividly described. Dante and Virgil are the explorers who find, as they "make their way through the rings of hell, the air grows

### *The image of the evil archfiend with horns and forked tail is well ingrained in the public psyche*

darker and colder". They see Lucifer beating his enormous wings. Everything about the Fallen Angel looks, writes Butler, "like a warning more terrible than the inscription at the gates of Hell, 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here'".

John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, 300 years after Dante, created a fuller description of the character of Lucifer. In his own environment he can appear "mighty, even God-like". Out of his element he can appear "undignified, a poisonous buffoon".

Mediæval Europe revelled in the two contradictory images of Satan. He took on a comic persona in folklore, but in the ecclesiastical context was depicted so graphically as to terrify the faithful into righteousness. Mediæval churches often had massive wall paintings of an imagined Hell with the Devil as tormentor-in-chief punishing the wicked. On the outside the buildings were adorned with fearsome gargoyles.

The survival of the Devil through the Enlightenment, the Romantic era and into the Age of Reason and modern times is addressed in detail. He exists as a metaphor in fiction. In iconographic form he survives in such spheres as the contemporary Gothic movements where he appears in fashion, visual arts and music. Attempts have been made to invent a Satanic religion with fantasy faux-rituals.

The philosophical study of the nature of evil is as pertinent now as ever, especially after a century which saw two world wars, the Holocaust and the invention of nuclear weapons. A figure to embody that evil remains fully employed.

The Devil also survives as a "reality" in the religious fundamentalist teachings that remain highly influential in the politics of conservative America. It is an apocalyptic faith that expects the Last Judgement imminently in a form based on the Book of Revelation in which the Devil, "The Beast", is ultimately defeated.

Yet in recent times, the origins of the figure are becoming obscured. It is forgotten that the Devil is a shape-shifter, taking on new forms for new generations. After the 9/11 attack in New York the composer Stockhausen talked of the terrorists' deed as "a Satanic composition".

Butler concludes: "Satan follows God's orders and plays second fiddle eternally." He is there to test the faith of the righteous. "The Devil as a cosmic force working to his own ends is mythology, pure and simple. Even if he plays the part of 'bad cop' Satan has never caused anything. At most, he has helped those already inclined to accomplish ignoble ends, in order to assure the damnation they merit."

Butler's book is a scholarly tour-de-force citing the widest range of thinkers. From St Augustine to Nietzsche, Freud and Foucault. And from the world of literature and the arts come Byron, Shelley, Mann, Blake and Mozart; even Hannibal Lecter gets a mention.

Notwithstanding the heavy duty material, the book remains a hellish good read.

★★★★★



# Mapping murders

**Cathi Unsworth** explores a fine resource for historians and crime writers

## Murder Maps

**Crime Scenes Revisited**

Drew Gray

Thames & Hudson 2020

Hb, 224pp, £25, ISBN 9780500252451

We are all familiar with the components of sensational crimes: an outrage that upends our notions of common decency and law enforcement's hunt to bring down the killer, harried by the bloodhounds of the press. What Drew Gray aims to illustrate in this handsome volume is how that process developed during the 19th century, as the industrial revolution drove populations into ever-expanding cities, and detection methods adapted to societal shifts and the attendant advances of science and philosophical thinking.

His samples are culled from "the world's most crime-ridden cities and regions" in Europe, North America and Australia, and his use of cartography inspired by psychologist David Canter's contribution to offender profiling. In mapping the movements of the miscreants we can, Gray says, "observe links between poverty, wealth, architecture and immigration in the geography of killing".

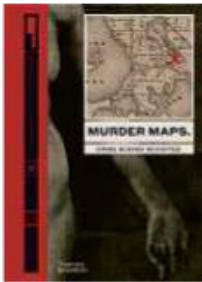
This comprehensive compendium – 123 cases in all – sets off on the most notorious quarter of London, the Ratcliffe Highway of 1811. Gray moves through the metropolis, recording the beginnings of forensics, toxicology, composite portrait, criminal profiling and fingerprinting. These murders are both infamous – Jack the Ripper, Crippen – and depressingly domestic, illustrated with innovative crime scene photographs and the evocative *Illustrated Police News*.

From here, via a sighting of Jack in Liverpool, he moves into France, where former convict Eugène-François Vidocq led Paris's first detective agency,

Alphonse Bertillon invented the "mug shot" and took the most haunting photographs presented here, the death scenes of women who died with their laced-up boots on. Here we meet "the French Jack", Joseph Vacher, who tried to dress up his voracious sex murders – as many as 25 of them – as political acts. In Italy, Gray charts the progress of proto-Mafioso gangs through a century of political turmoil, banditry and mutating land borders. Then it's on to North America, where with the mass immigration of malcontents from the Old World, cycles of poverty, racism and entrepreneurialism created new frontiers of criminality. In Australia, victims are at their most vulnerable – babies and children forming a core of cases predicated by desperate social conditions. Jack the Ripper turns up again on each new continent.

There is an incredible amount of information stylishly compressed into this layout – but therein also lies its problems. The maps themselves, mainly drawn from the David Rumsey collection, look beautiful. But when the contours are dense, finding the tiny annotative dots requires a magnifying glass. They also lack the contextualising information, such as would be found on Booth's Poverty Maps, to illustrate the contributory social factors to each crime. Gray doesn't surmise much of his own conclusions in his text – which, by necessity is so concise it borders on terse – leaving the readers to don their own deerstalkers. But he does provide a Further Reading List and a fine resource for historians and crime writers alike to reimagine that other vital element: the stories behind those lives cut short, that cry out to us still.

★★★★



## Glastonbury Holy Thorn

**Story of a Legend**

Adam Stout

Green & Pleasant Publishing 2020

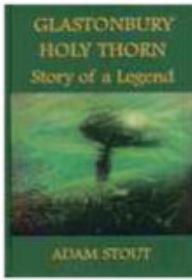
Hb, 154pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781916268609

Not all historians approach a legend as Adam Stout does, with such a fusion of critical acumen and human sympathy. The Thorn turns out to be a late thread in Glastonbury's mythic tapestry, first appearing in 1520, long after the saints and the Grail. But unlike the banished monks or the bones of Arthur, it is actually there; you can see it, touch it and, unfortunately, you can hack it down.

That is how a Civil War zealot treated the first Thorn – or was it the first? The tree can easily be perpetuated by grafting, so it may have had ancestors, and has certainly left descendants. "Now is the time to plant the holy thorn" is not, as you might think, the opening of a sermon, but advice from the catalogue of G Chislett, nurseryman. A work of faith in the age of botanical reproduction, the Thorn owes more of its sacred reputation than you might think to business sense, but isn't that true of Glastonbury itself?

People obsessed by the Thorn look at a tree and see miracles worked by the Crown of Thorns, or evidence of a pure evangelisation of England, or proof of the wickedness of calendar reform; any theory, as long as it is against the grain. Stout has a fondness for these epistemic resistance movements, so that the actual *Crataegus monogyna* soon becomes a MacGuffin in the search for appropriations of the Glastonbury legacy. Meanings multiply faster than cuttings, until it seems that a new version of the Thorn will shoot in any intellectual soil – royalist or republican, Catholic or Protestant, Christian or Pagan.

Who owns the Thorn today? There is one in the ruined abbey, another outside the parish church, many more in the surrounding villages, while the Pagans have their own branch at Chalice Well. In 1936, 1,000 nonconformists were gathering



piously at the site of the original, which would have surprised the original nonconformist who cut it down. But Glastonbury thrives on contradictions. Invented traditions, like the despatch of a flowering sprig to the monarch on Christmas Day, get caught up in the interlace of fact and fancy, and next thing you know, the Christmas gift appears in *The Mists of Avalon* as an ancient Goddess tradition.

So awesome is the 2,000-year antiquity claimed for the Thorn as a relic, that it seems bathetic to record the brief life-span of actual thorns. These shrubs peg out after decades rather than centuries, especially when struggling on the holy but meagre soil of the Avalonian hills. The Thorn, like those Japanese temples that have been rebuilt every generation since the remotest antiquity, is ever old and ever new: a vegetative relic that can be multiplied indefinitely to meet the needs of piety and commerce.

Just as there is no one true Thorn, there is no primary, authentic meaning behind its story. Adam Stout, a natural non-prophet, celebrates the polysemic power of the Thorn to signify, regardless of what is being signified. He concludes with a glorious image of the tree as a type of Hope, which is so very Avalonian that we are swept up in it without ever quite gathering what it is that we are hoping for.

Jeremy Harte

★★★★★

## Brazil That Never Was

Andrew Lees

Notting Hill Editions 2020

Hb, 139pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781912559213

In 1925 Colonel Percy Fawcett vanished into the remote jungle of the Mato Grosso, near the border between Brazil and Bolivia, in search of a fabled lost city. The mystery surrounding his disappearance was a source of popular fascination for decades, and recent years have seen fresh claims and revelations. In 2005 the *New Yorker* journalist David Grann traced Fawcett's last known footsteps in the Amazon and produced a bestselling book, *The Lost City of Z*, which suggested that his wild-sounding





claims have been corroborated by recent archaeological finds of monumental earthworks. In 2016 Grann's account was turned into a major Hollywood movie, which portrayed Fawcett as a romantic and intrepid outsider consumed by his quest for knowledge.

This version of the story was vigorously rubbished by experts such as the Amazon explorer and former head of the Royal Geographical Society John Hemming, who described Fawcett as "a nutter, a racist" and a reckless incompetent whose Amazon explorations were publicity-driven ventures fuelled by long-discredited myths. In 2004 the writer Misha Williams, custodian of a trove of family papers, showed that Fawcett's dream of a lost city had been bound up with his belief in Theosophy and the hidden domains of Madame Blavatsky's ascended masters. Williams concluded that Fawcett had never intended to return from his final journey: its true goal, concealed from the funding applications and press releases, was to establish an esoteric spiritual community in the remote jungle.

As a child growing up in Liverpool, Andrew Lees hung around the docks watching the steamers that delivered tea, cotton, chocolate and bananas from exotic ports around the globe. His favourite was the *SS Hilary*, which plied the trade with Brazil. He studied maps of the Amazon and obsessively read *Exploration Fawcett*, the bestseller published by Percy Fawcett's son Brian in 1953. Now a distinguished neurologist and a fluent Portuguese speaker, he returns to his childhood obsession, picking his way through the contradictory accounts of Fawcett – intrepid adventurer, vainglorious amateur, questing mystic – and finally making a personal journey deep into Amazonia.

Lees immerses himself in the documentary sources that reveal Fawcett's imaginative world, and in the occult milieu that nourished his belief in the existence of a lost high civilisation in the jungle. His own experiences in the Amazon expose him to the ugliness of its modern develop-

ment but also provide flashes of transcendence, climaxing with an epiphany under the hallucinatory influence of ayahuasca in which fantasy and reality merge and the present becomes "a movie of my faraway past". Ultimately, his investigations produce an eloquent, beautifully crafted meditation on *saudade*, the bittersweet Portuguese term that encompasses nostalgia, loss and the yearning for another world.

Mike Jay

★★★★★

## Phallacy

**Life Lessons from the Animal Penis**

Emily Willingham

Avery 2020

Hb, 336pp, £20, ISBN 9780593087176

Fortean interest may be aroused by this survey of what the author calls "intromitta" from across the animal kingdom – any kind of penis-like structure that penetrates – and many will enjoy the author's skewering of the scientific patriarchy that once studied them.

We are introduced to musical, exploding, hooked, outsized and detachable penises, alongside their proud, sneaky or self-destructive owners – including slugs, mites, Neanderthals and intersex pigs. We learn of the world's oldest erection preserved in amber and of the first full colour printed image: of a penis.

But for such a visual subject matter there are no photos, only a handful of very simple sketches. And an impotent editor leaves us encountering many of the same themes and examples over and over again.

There is also a heavy-handed political message, the "life lesson" of the subtitle: that having a penis is no excuse to Do Bad Things. It is hard to imagine that if you really needed to hear this, that you would be reading this book, or *Fortean Times* for that matter. But clearly men in the American intellectual establishment still do, as Willingham calls out their shocking professional and personal malpractice throughout.

Unfortunately she spreads her ammunition fairly widely, targeting not only the criminal and abhorrent (Jeffrey Epstein), but

the merely controversial (Jordan Peterson) or outspoken (Steven Pinker). The attack on evolutionary psychologist Pinker, clearly presented as a fist-pumping moment of righteous affirmation, feels particularly limp.

The book rises to its final, and by far its best chapter, reviewing the history of religious and cultural responses to the penis, taking in Greek Satyrs, the Roman God Priapus and the Egyptian Penis Lord Min in a few paragraphs. Willingham fascinates when she compares the cultural penetration of the penis-obsessed Freud with the impact of the *Mal-leus Maleficarum* (Hammer of the Witches) upon Western thought. There are brief trips to the Icelandic phallogological museum and a penis-tree fresco in Tuscany.

But this over-extended book will ultimately be of most interest to readers who wish to explore the exquisitely inflamed friction points between science and this particular strand of modern politics. For others, the repetitive and occasionally lecturing tone may inspire a premature exit.

Ryan Shirlow

★★

## The Doctor who Fooled the World

**Science, Deception and the War on Vaccines**

Brian Deer

Johns Hopkins University Press 2020

Pb, 416pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781911617808

Dr Andrew Wakefield, a young gastroenterologist doing research into inflammatory bowel disease, developed a fascination with viruses, believing that vaccination with the MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine might cause Crohn's disease or even autism. Egged on by the parents of autistic children, he performed a clinical study on 12 autistic youngsters, who were subjected to a series of medical procedures. He concluded that the MMR vaccine had triggered a syndrome of enterocolitis and autism, holding a press conference and spreading the word to the international press, striking fear into parents of young children and effectively reducing the vaccination rates in both Britain and the US.

There was soon controversy about Wakefield's 1998 research

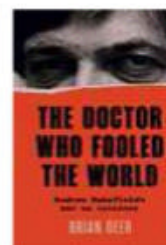
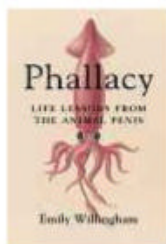
paper about the link between MMR and autism, published in the prestigious *Lancet*. Other researchers could not reproduce his findings, and many people expressed reservations regarding both the low number of participants in the study and Wakefield's lack of qualifications in paediatrics and virology. *Sunday Times* journalist Brian Deer became a leading critic, accusing Wakefield of scientific dishonesty in articles and TV documentaries. The case histories of several of the participating children had been falsified, and they had not been randomly introduced into the study. Wakefield had illicitly been taking money from a solicitor representing the parents of autistic children. In 2010 the General Medical Council found him unfit to practise medicine. His 1998 *Lancet* paper was retracted as the result of fraudulent research, and several of his other academic contributions were also withdrawn. Other, more reputable researchers have since conducted a number of larger and better planned clinical studies, looking for a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, but found none.

After being struck off, Wakefield managed to land on his feet. He received a hero's welcome from the transatlantic anti-vaccination movement. Many American parents of autistic children had greatly welcomed his study, since his hypothesis provided not only a convenient explanation to their condition, but also a ticket to ride on the profitable gravy train of compensation claims against the vaccine manufacturers. Wakefield regularly speaks at anti-vaxxer rallies and is lauded by his supporters.

Deer's book contains everything you would ever want to know about the Wakefield MMR-autism fraud, and then some. He is the great expert on this matter and has obviously felt the need to include every detail about the controversy. His book is over-long at more than 400 pages, with a rambling narrative and many unnecessary anecdotes and asides; a shorter and more focused book would surely have attracted a wider readership.

Jan Bondeson

★★★





# The compleat bigfoot

This magnificent two-volume study does for bigfoot what Jacques Vallée did for UFOs, says **Eric Hoffmann**

## Where the Footprints End

High Strangeness and the Bigfoot Phenomenon

Vol 1: Folklore; Vol 2: Evidence

Joshua Cutchin & Timothy Renner

Dark Holler Arts 2020

Vol 1, Pb, 320pp, £16.01 ISBN 9798634992617

Vol 2, Pb, 313pp, £15.09, ISBN 9798580596747

As with UFOs, bigfoot has always straddled the line between hard science and high strangeness. Just as nuts-and-bolts UFO researchers slavishly obsess over radar blips and crashed saucers or search interminably for evidence of devious military cover-ups, bigfoot investigators, in their attempt to prove the creature's existence, often look to physical evidence in the form of footprints, shelters, faeces, hair or recorded sounds and images. While investigators should not rule out physical evidence for confirmation of bigfoot's existence, to focus solely on a single hypothesis such as flesh and blood creatures can often be self-defeating, particularly when evidence suggests that the phenomenon may possess non-physical attributes that cannot be scientifically confirmed or disproved.

In *Where the Footprints End: High Strangeness and the Bigfoot Phenomenon*, a magnificent two-volume exploration of the subject, authors Joshua Cutchin and Timothy Renner attempt to do for this near-mythological creature what Jacques Vallée did for UFOs in his seminal *Passport to Magonia*; namely, to rescue complex, often inexplicable and anomalous phenomena from the needless limitations of over-simplified, linear interpretations, and to explore the ways in which these anomalies mirror specific cultural, philosophical, and sociological manifestations.

In their holistic overview, Cutchin and Renner, like Vallée, pay close attention to the ways

in which bigfoot is often closely aligned with certain entirely human beliefs, symbols and systems. The authors look beyond the physical evidence, "where the footprints end", to provide an altogether comprehensive survey of bigfoot's intersection with assorted folkloric and supernatural phenomena.

In so doing, Cutchin and Renner risk the temptation to answer one unknown with another, and the accusation might be levelled that their entire thesis leans on this. Yet the authors pointedly note that they "do not claim bigfoot are aliens, faeries, ghosts, witches, living balls of plasma or anything else... Rather, the mission statement of this work is to highlight under-appreciated similarities between modern bigfoot sightings and folklore most researchers dismiss as unrelated to the phenomenon ...



Further, the intention is not to work backwards from an alternative idea, but rather to propose a means of

combating confirmation bias and keeping assumptions in check ... [and] to rather open up another path of inquiry when investigating anomalous activity in the wilderness."

To address adequately the full range of occurrences associated with bigfoot without succumbing to outright advocacy of one theory versus another requires a commensurate impartiality and objectivity, and Cutchin and Renner more than rise to the occasion. In paranormal literature especially, responsible scholarly circumspection is always warranted and is here exceedingly met.

Following Vallée, Cutchin and Renner's first volume, *Folklore*, concentrates on aspects bigfoot shares with legend and myth, particularly

witches, faeries and ghosts. Most tantalising is their study of bigfoot's similarity to poltergeist behaviour, specifically its elusive materialisation and evaporation, and the use of lithoboly (rock throwing) and wood knocks. Because of these correspondences, the authors propose that bigfoot might in fact be a *wildnisgeist* or wilderness poltergeist.

The second volume, *Evidence*, examines both the substantial body of witness testimony – including an insightful and thought-provoking analysis of bigfoot's appearance in tandem with mystery lights and UFOs, bizarre encounters that suggest that bigfoot may in fact be an interdimensional being – and the more metaphysical aspects of the scant "scientific" physical evidence, such as footprints, stick signs, vocalisations and



mimicry. Cutchin and Renner's research is comprehensive, as the copious footnotes attest;

because of their number, they might have been better placed in the back matter as opposed to the end of each chapter, to help ease the flow of reading. Another source of frustration is that the authors often refer to themselves in the first person, yet without knowledge of who wrote what, it is often somewhat difficult to discern to whom the authors refer.

But these are minor complaints. The text is authoritative while approachable, their research exhaustive but not exhausting. Together these two volumes should stand as the go-to texts for anyone interested in the more esoteric aspects of the bigfoot phenomenon. Essential.

Vol 1 Folklore ★★★★★

Vol 2 Evidence ★★★★★

## Bees and Their Keepers

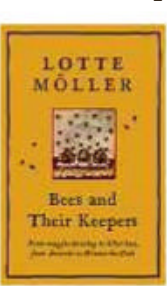
Lotte Möller, tr Frank Perry

MacLehose Press 2020

Hb, 224pp, £20, ISBN 9781529405262

One look at the deep, rich, Winnie-the-Pooh-coloured cover, the illustration of bees and hives and the gently archaic font... this is the kind of cover that could seduce any shelf-browsing reader.

Originally written in Swedish, *Bees and Their Keepers* is both a personal perspective from one who "bees just happened to" and the history and folklore of bees and beekeeping from the Cretaceous period right up to the



development of robot bees. Part One progresses through a calendar year, each chapter representing a new month with a

new theme allowing the reader to participate in the ebb and flow of both the bees' and keepers' routines. Part Two is less personal and more information-focused with lists of honey stockists, bee museums and longer discussions over bee care. Throughout the book, the text is punctuated with beautiful illustrations, paintings and photographs further bringing to life the complicated and intimate relationship between humans and bees.

There is no doubting Lotte Möller's love for her subject. If I have one criticism it would be that the book is so full of fascinating information that sometimes I barely had time to digest what I'd read before the next snippet arrived. But there's a feeling of being invited into some sort of secret club witnessing beekeepers discuss the taste of honey. We hear how the Bee Welcome project encourages Swedish beekeepers to train newly arrived refugees in the art of beekeeping, read tales of naughty bears licking hives, and learn about UFO-informed pollen collectors. There is so much to enjoy in this book, that maybe it's okay to let it roll over you as you read it.

Möller has a strong voice, charming, funny and authoritative; so even if bees and honey really aren't your thing, it's still a pleasure to be in her company.

Liza Frank

★★★★★





Pages from **HOT JAZZ**, featuring Max Zillion. All the remaining pages from this book are on sale at various prices from cheap to more expensive.



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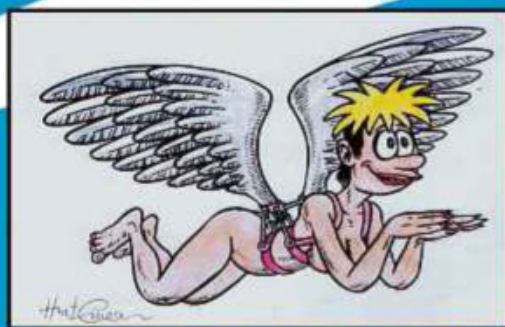


Pages from **CASANOVA'S LAST STAND**.

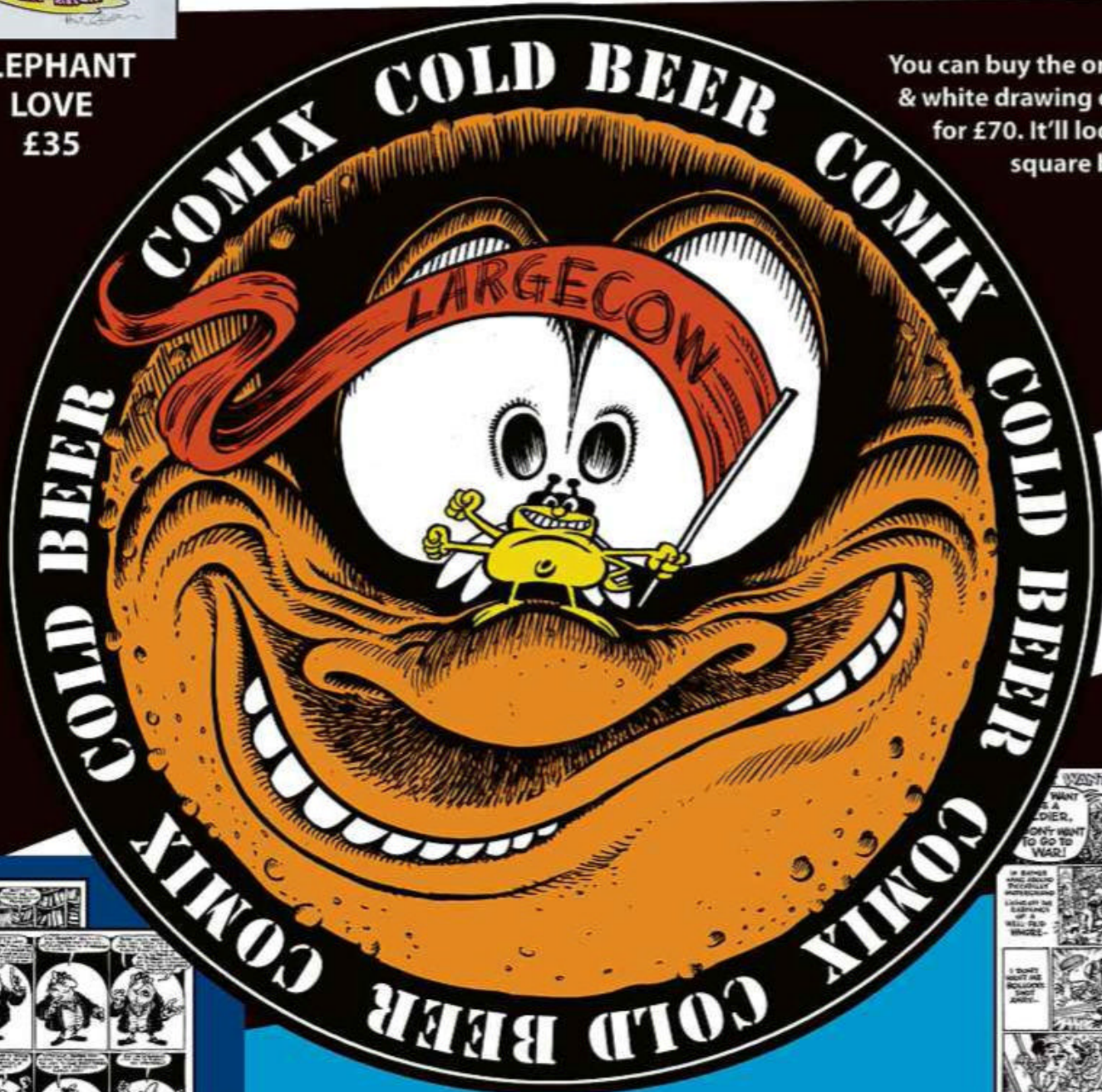
These pages are some of the best drawing I've ever done. There are currently 12 pages in the Shop at various prices; I'll be adding more, though some of them I'm loath to let go!



**Dr. DEE** from Great Occultists - £350. This drawing comes with the pencil version, and an early sketch.



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## Terror on ice

The Ridley Scott-produced series about the mysterious fate of a Naval expedition to find the Northwest Passage is an enjoyable blend of fact and fiction that can't quite maintain its icy grip



### The Terror

Dir Edward Drake, US 2020  
On digital platforms

I doubt there are many forteans who haven't heard of *HMS Terror* and *HMS Erebus* or their ill-fated expedition in 1845 to confirm and navigate the Northwest Passage through the Arctic Ocean. On the off chance, though: simply put, the ships never came back and indeed were never found (until recently; see **FT376:4**), with no indication of what happened to the men on board. It's a maritime mystery to rival the *Mary Celeste*.

In 2007 American author Dan Simmons wrote a doorstopper novel about the expedition, speculating as to what became of the crew, incorporating elements from horror, mysticism, and Inuit mythology. I must confess that I started reading it but, bogged down by too much detail and a certain diffuseness, I gave up; it started brilliantly but gradually became less and less interesting.

To a certain extent that is also true of this television adaptation of Simmons's novel. The first few episodes (of 10), essentially those set on board the ships, are terrific. The basic plot sees Captain Sir John Franklin (Ciaran Harris, at his most lugubrious) order both ships to proceed through the ice despite the onset of winter,

*The men are being stalked by what they take to be a giant polar bear*

ignoring the advice of his second-in-command Captain Francis Crozier (Jared Harris). Inevitably, they get trapped, frozen into the pack ice. Although supplies are plentiful, there are concerns that the canned goods they rely on have become contaminated; the crew become resentful and cliques begin to form. The worst problem by far, though, is that the men are being stalked by what they take to be a giant polar bear. Deaths ensue. During a recce, an Inuit man is accidentally shot and killed; his daughter (Nive Nielsen) – whom the crew dub Lady Silence – is taken on board for questioning and it transpires her father was a shaman, with some control over the beast. With his death, the creature becomes more and more aggressive.

This is all great stuff: tense, claustrophobic, brutal and with a growing sense of utter dread. The minutiae of life aboard a 19th century naval vessel are depicted well: the drudgery, the snobbery, the petty arguments, the casual

violence. There are subplots galore, so there's always plenty going on: will the food drive the men insane? Will they mutiny? Will a homosexual relationship be revealed? Will Lady Silence fall victim to the increasingly fractious crew? The period detail is good and – despite some dreadfully fake scenes on the ice – it is immersive and convincing.

The problems begin when the decision is made to abandon ship and establish a camp on the solid ground of King William Island. It's at this point, and in subsequent episodes, that the crew splinter off into different groups, all of which appear to wander off in different directions, to the extent that it's difficult to keep track of who is where. Most of the cast, apart from the principals, are played by actors unknown to me, and with lots of small roles I had trouble telling them apart.

The story becomes more concerned with how the men are going to survive long enough to reach civilisation and the stuff about the giant, man-eating polar bear is rather forgotten. When it is eventually seen close up, it's pretty unconvincing, and you wonder why so little imagination went into its digital design. The belated attempt to 'explain' the creature by linking it with Inuit culture and mythology is never properly explored.

Having said all that, *The Terror* is still very watchable and there is much to enjoy. The transformation of Crozier's antagonistic attitude towards the haughty Commander James Fitzjames (Tobias Menzies) into one of genuine friendship, borne out of human solidarity in the face of death, is great, for instance. Jared Harris is superb, as he always seems to be, and special mention must go to Adam Nagaitis as Hickey, the malevolent and scheming caulker's mate.

This isn't for the faint-hearted. I wouldn't say that it's terrifying, but it is gruesome and contains

scenes which are consistent not just with the harsh necessities of survival but also with some of the archaeological evidence found decades later. Exactly what happened remains a mystery but, in the absence of an explanation, *The Terror* will do quite nicely.

Daniel King



### Battle Royale

Dir Kinji Fukasaku, Japan 2000  
Arrow Video, 4K UHD Blu-ray, £79.99

21 years since its release, director Kinji Fukasaku's treatise on the dynamics of power has lost none of its strength or watchability. Adapted from the novel by Koushun Takami, the plot is simple: Japanese society is on the brink of collapse, facing mass unemployment and disaffection in its youth. Students are abandoning schools, and casual violence is inflicted on the harried teachers. A law is passed, with the anodyne title of the 'Millennium Educational Reform Act', also known as the Battle Royale Act, which sees a class of school children sent to an island and forced to kill each other until only one remains.

In essence, the film is *Lord of the Flies* with ultraviolence. Students are given a pack containing a weapon, ranging from grenades to saucepan lids, and Fukasaku revels in showing the students getting despatched in a variety of bloody ways. It is gory and it is brutal, but also surprisingly funny and incredibly touching. While the characterisation comes in broad strokes, you immediately feel attached to these kids, and root for them. The main characters, Shuya and Noriko, are both sweet and idealistic, unwilling to get involved in the killing and desperately hoping to convince their fellow students to work together. More fun to watch are





those who are immediately playing to win, or quickly learn that it's every man for himself. Masanobu And is wonderfully scary as Kazuo Kiriyama, an outsider who has signed up for fun: a ginger sprite who leaps around gleefully machine-gunning the other students. Better still is Mitsuko Souma, a class outcast who quickly becomes one of the deadliest players in the game. Ko Shibasaki plays Mitsuko with a devilish grin and an animal ferocity, but you still manage to feel sorry for her when she eventually gets her comeuppance.

Aside from the students, the other key character is Kitano, their former teacher who serves as games master. Played by the legendary 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano, he is an enigmatic presence. While he rather callously kills off some students himself, and enjoys his regular announcements letting the kids know which of their peers have been killed, he is certainly not an outright villain. Rather, he's a man who has been pushed to the limit and is using the draconian laws of the country to restore some kind of order. His relationship with his daughter, one of seeming complete incomprehension, crystallises the lack of communication which underlies the whole situation.

With the opening of the film showing the mediated finale of a previous event, *Battle Royale* also touches presciently on the ever-more extreme content of reality TV, in a way that would go on to be explored in films like *Series 7: The Contenders* and *My Little Eye*, and has a lineage stretching back to Nigel Kneale's *The Year of the Sex Olympics*. It remains a classic.

This set also includes the pointless special edition, which fleshes out certain characters and adds a cheesy wraparound, and the fairly dreadful 2003 sequel *Battle Royale: Requiem*. Where the first film remains fresh and zingy, *Requiem* felt tired on its release and time has not been kind to it. *Battle Royale* understood the need to match its philosophical core with splashy popcorn thrills, while *Requiem* just feels preachy. If you're a glutton for punishment, there is an extended version too.

**Martin Parsons**



## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.peterlaws.co.uk](http://www.peterlaws.co.uk))

### The Power

Dir Corinna Faith, UK 2021  
Streaming on Shudder

### Things Heard and Seen

Dir Shari Springer Berman/Robert Pulcini, US 2021  
Streaming on Netflix

### The Reckoning

Dir Neil Marshall, UK 2020  
Available on digital platforms

### Flashback

Dir Christopher MacBride, Canada 2020  
Available on digital platforms

### Psycho Goreman

Dir Steven Kostanski, Canada 2020  
Streaming on Shudder

### Mandy

Dir Panos Cosmatos, UK/France/Belgium/US 2018  
Dazzler Media, £24.99 (Blu-ray)

We've got a packed slate this month, starting with *The Power*, a hospital chiller set in 1974, but with depressingly timely themes. The title card announces that "Trade unions and the government are at war" and "Blackouts plunge the nation into darkness every night". A perfect setting for vengeful ghosts to terrorise a skeleton staff of nurses on the night shift. Rose Williams shines as Val, a meek, troubled trainee and prime target of the furious spirit. They couldn't have named this anything else really, since it's about all types of power: electrical, supernatural and especially institutional.

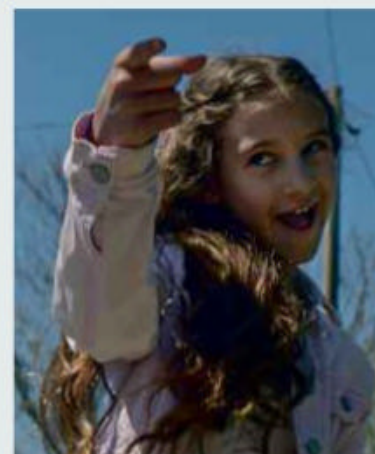
Thematically similar, but more lavishly produced, is *Things Heard and Seen*, a Gothic, *Amityville*-style chiller where a couple called Catherine and George (Kathy and George Lutz, anyone?) find their marriage failing



### Nicolas Cage seeks vengeance against a bunch of "evil Jesus freaks"

under the influence of angry spirits. Swedish mystic and theologian Swedenborg is a frequent reference in this generic, and yet entertaining 90s-style throwback.

Genre legend Neil Marshall returns with his plague-ridden witch-hunt tale, *The Reckoning*, which, I'm sorry to report, is a weirdly flat affair. Not least because of a frustratingly one-note performance by Charlotte Kirk as the innocent woman exacting kick-ass revenge on her



pious torturers. Who knew they had lipstick and hair salons in 17th century England? I thought something was amiss when even a brutal torture scene failed to shock. Sean Pertwee lifts the film and the atmospheric score is a plus point, but even that is overused, playing through almost every second of the movie. Marshall's skills flash now and then, yet something has gone awry with *The Reckoning*. Still, this is the first mediæval plague film I've watched during this pandemic, and Covid gave some of the contamination scenes some genuine resonance.

In *Flashback*, *Maze Runner* heartthrob Dylan O'Brien struggles with his new job after the mind-frying drug he tried at school starts giving him aftershocks years later. When time starts to loop on itself, he can't tell if his current life is real or if he's still back in the school basement, tripping with his friends. The intensely sombre mood and slow, confusing story will challenge some audiences (it did me), yet the themes are fairly intriguing and O'Brien does well with a challenging, grown-up role.

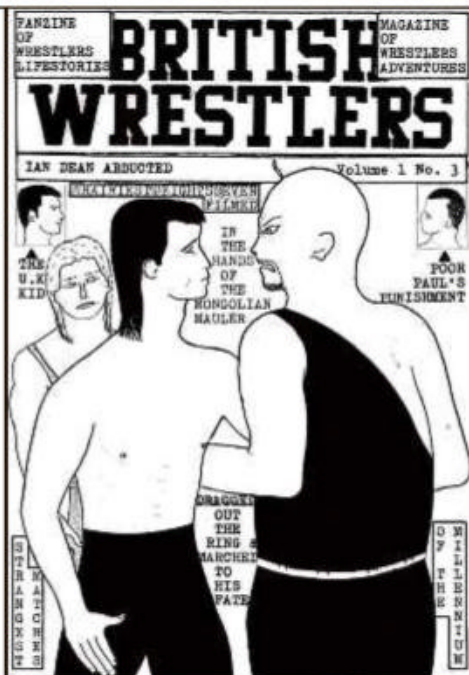
There's just space to squeeze in two more psychedelic treats. Firstly, you really must try *Psycho Goreman*, in which a sassy little girl called Mimi finds a gem that controls the Dark Lord of the Universe. It's done as a *Power Rangers*-style kids movie, complete with a closing credits rap song about "staying in school" and "not doing drugs" – but with extreme gore and twisted, sick humour. I loved it.

Finally, the fabulous *Mandy* is now on Blu-ray. Stoner lumberjack Nicolas Cage seeks manic vengeance against a bunch of "crazy evil weirdo, hippy-type Jesus Freaks" and "gnarly biker psychos". The dialogue in this film is a delight, but it's the visuals that blow you away. Save money on drugs and just watch this. It's a trip.



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# LETTERS

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## Apologia for astrology

Brian Perry's response [FT403:68-69] to comments on astrology by MG Sherlock [FT400:75] falls flat in various ways. Apparently, astrology is "not so much a predictive art but more a means of insight into people and situations". Even if this is accepted at face value, the methodology remains a pseudoscience. His finding 'fascinating truths' about historical periods, or people, through horoscopes is potentially open to a range of psychological and other biases that would make the results less than compelling. Perry's 'feeling' that astrology "does not respond well to quantitative statistical analysis" is an example of something that the psychologist Ray Hyman called 'loopholism' – "The tendency to seek out each and every loophole in a sceptical account as a way to protect one's belief in a cherished supernatural or pseudoscientific claim".

My favourite example comes from a study Hyman reported on a double-blind test of an aspect of applied kinesiology. A group of chiropractors agreed to take part and first 'successfully' demonstrated how a subject's arm resistance was greater when a drop of water containing a good sugar (fructose) was placed on their tongue compared with a 'bad' sugar (glucose). Later all parties were blinded to which solution of sugar was which and the tests failed. The head chiropractor turned to Hyman and said: "You see, that is why we never do double-blind testing anymore. It never works!" Apparently, he was quite serious.

**Ron Gardner**

*Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire*

## Who says?

I would like to point out another flaw in Carl Sagan's assertion that "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" [FT404:55]: namely, who decides that a claim is "extraordinary"? If it is a sceptical scientist like Sagan, they have arbitrarily upped the proof requirement.

## SIMULACRA CORNER



This photograph from *Granny Trek* by Beryl Griffiths (Berty Books, UK, 2009) was sent in by David Gamon. Ms Griffiths walked 600 miles (970km) to raise money for a children's hospice, and in this image the folds on her coat look like a sad child.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to [sieveking@forteanimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com)*

Their "extraordinary" may be my "odd, but just outside normal experience" – in which case, ordinary standards of evidence apply. The "Sagan Standard" can only apply where there is consensus that the claim is "extraordinary".

**Martin Jenkins**

*London*

## Story embroidered

With regard to the article "Death Ship" about the *Ourang Medan* [FT402:32-37]: *The World's Greatest Ghosts* by Roger Boar and Nigel Blundell (Hamlyn 1986) has a page about this ship which contains some additional 'information'. For instance, it states that the first ship to reach the *Ourang Medan* arrived within three hours of receiving the distress call. It also

quotes one of the crew of the rescue ship as saying: "Sharks were surging around the hull, and it looked like every shark in the Bay of Bengal had homed in on her, knowing there was death aboard". It also mentions that the ship's dog was found dead with its paws in the air and "fangs bared". According to this report, the rescue crew only just had time to get back to their own ship and cut the towline after discovering a fire onboard. The *Ourang Medan* then exploded, and, in a vengeful detail, "... even killed some of the hungry sharks". No references are given for any of this, and the *Ourang Medan* was not, by any definition a 'ghost'. Rather fittingly though (maybe), the next case discussed in the book is the *Mary Celeste*.

**Norman Darwen**

*Lostock, Greater Manchester*

## Calverton road ghosts

The Ruskington Horror features [FT401:32-38, 402:38-43] were intriguing and suggest that apparitional sightings are indicative of 're-play' hauntings or an update of genius loci or 'spirit of place'. They bring to mind stories from a neighbouring county. The Nottinghamshire village of Calverton has reports of

ghostly activity along George's Lane, one of the main routes into the village. The road winds uphill for around a mile before reaching the village, with the uphill stretch called George's Hill. Since at least the 1930s, there have been sightings of a black, broadly amorphous figure, seen crossing the road in front of cars, usually in the evening or late at night. It appears to be wearing a hat and sometimes to have a silver chain or cross around its neck, but with everything below the neck visible only as an undefined shape. It terrifies drivers with its sudden appearance in the road before vanishing and, in one account, it closely followed a jogger for several seconds before disappearing. A figure has also been reported to appear in the back seats of cars travelling along this road, but usually only when the driver is alone, and is only visible in the rear view mirror. One witness described it as an old lady, based on the hat. The stories are so well known, and apparently the sightings once occurred so frequently, that local taxi drivers will only enter and leave the village at night using an alternative route.

I find it interesting that so many roads in the UK and elsewhere in the world play host to so many similar, though subtly different, events. It makes me wonder whether roads, especially those existing for centuries, qualify as liminal places. After all, roads physically divide areas from each other, in a similar manner to rivers and other watercourses.

**Aaron Bulley**

*By email*



# LETTERS

## A clear conscience

I found Phil Brand's letter on the last days of elderly Spanish Civil War veterans fascinating [FT400:74]. I am inclined to take a cultural view. Those veterans who fought for Franco would have been more likely to be devout Catholics, believers in the possibility of eternal damnation. Therefore they may have fixated more on their sins catching up with them as life ebbed away. On the other hand, Spanish Republicans were more likely to be atheists, or at least more secular in outlook. It would make sense, then, for them to have more secular thoughts as they passed on. My sympathies are very much with the Republicans, but it is important to remember that atrocities were committed on both sides, as is often the case in civil conflicts. I suppose that hardcore communists, who believed that the ends justified the means and didn't believe in divine retribution, would have died with particularly clear consciences.

**Lewis JW Hurst**  
Tokyo, Japan

## Inland mermaids

Simon Young notes that mermaids were often spotted in fresh water [FT402:29]. In Scotland, mermaids seem to have made manifest the spirit and power of a lake just as well as water-horses or water bulls. The first known report describes Morag, the monster of Loch Morar, as a mermaid, and another one lived in Loch Rannoch:

"Then there are the mermaids, the kelpies of the south and the water bulls and horses of the north, of the lochs and streams, as stoutly believed by the peasantry who now live beside them as they were centuries ago. [...] As to the mermaids of the lochs, they still exist past all dispute – at least with their friends the Highlanders. The railways, telegraphs and newspapers, like the heartless poachers they are, have 'swept' or seined them well out of the lowland shires. They



## Fuzzy head

This photo, recently found in a batch of undeveloped negatives from the early 1980s, shows me as a child having what appears to be some kind of paranormal experience. I have no idea why there is an axe beside the fireplace, but rest assured the photo was taken in a 1970s suburban bungalow.

**Paul Brown, Co. Durham**

are and were both dangerous and beneficent personages. In olden times they were not above giving recipes for brashes, ringworm and other common ailments. Today they have all retreated to the shadowy Highland lochs, where they find comfortable flat stones to sit upon, and there, while combing their masses of long, yellow hair, sing in plaintive tones much that is ill or good to be heard. I know one canny auld wife of northern Perthshire who gets along very comfortably through her confidential relations with a mermaid that at present passes the summer season at Loch Rannoch." (*Kentucky New Era*, 18 July 1891)

At Loch Ness, a local possessed not only a kelpie's bridle but also a mermaid's stone (Alexander MacDonald: *Story and Song from Loch Ness-side*, Gaelic Society of Inverness, 1914, p.142). And finally, that stalwart of serious journalism, the *Weekly World News*, carried on the tale and headlined on 27 August 1996 "Divers Spot Mermaids in Loch Ness". "Jean and Genevieve Dousson, a

married couple from Bordeaux, France, say they saw 'at least 50' fish-tailed humanoids swimming together in a group 92 feet beneath the surface." They have yet to show up on sonar, though.

**Ulrich Magin**  
Hennef, Germany

In his column on 'mermaids' [FT402:29], Simon Young professes to be shocked at the prevalence of inland place-names referring to mermaids. The reason can be found in Old English (OE) etymology. OE *mere* can signify either the sea (as in mermaid) or an enclosed body of water or pond (as in, for example, Windermere). *Maid* is a diminutive form of maiden (OE *maegden*), but OE *maed* comes down to us as meadow or (archaically) mead.

What Mr Young has probably come across is a corruption of the once fairly common field-name *meremead* – a meadow with a pond. This explains how, once the ancient meaning had been lost, tales of mermaids might arise, however far from salt-water the place might be.

Interestingly, there is a pub

in Portsmouth which is called the Mermaid. On the surface this looks like an obvious name in a naval city full of seafaring folk, but it is in fact named after Meremede Field in which it was built. There are no reports of spectral nudity unless you count the occasional appearance of a stripper at another pub nearby.

**Philip Eley**  
Gosport, Hampshire

## The Cosmic Fixer

I have long been intrigued by what poltergeists *don't* do as much as by their actions. The (second) Battersea Poltergeist does deserve greater recognition as perhaps the UK's longest and arguably best-attested case [FT404:24-36]. However, given that these apparent entities like "Donald" often seem delinquent in nature, causing chaos, damaging property, making sinister threats etc, there still seems to be a clear element of limitation and control over their activities, not only in terms of the physical harm that they cause but also in what they reveal about themselves and where they come from.

Many poltergeists seem by nature to be rule-breakers as well as crockery breakers. The personalities that come through are frequently coarse, crude and banal in word and deed, as if they are a sort of spiritual low-life who have somehow broken into a restricted area and are indulging in a bit of vandalism. Sadly, there seems no limit to the potential depravity of human behaviour on Earth and no word or action too forbidden, depraved or extreme that someone has not said or done it at some point. So what exercises control over entities that in other respects seem quick-tempered, loose-moraled and lacking in restraint? What's stopping them giving more of the game away? Are there rules they can't break?

Harold Chibbett's tireless but mostly fruitless attempts to try and verify the 'facts' offered up by Donald about his earthly life were a case in point. Tantalising details were offered by





the entity, but proof remained elusive and there were a host of blind alleys, falsehoods, errors and contradictions for sceptics to pounce on. This will no doubt remain the case despite the recent revival in publicity following the BBC dramatisation. I have noted over many years of reading about forteen phenomena that if there is a Cosmic Joker at play, it seems to be closely followed by a Cosmic Fixer who manages to ensure that there is enough retrospective doubt about what occurred that a majority of people will never accept it as ‘fact’, and that the mainstream world view is never altered as a result.

This Cosmic Fixer sometimes manifests itself in the form of one or two episodes of clumsy and obvious fraud by a poltergeist focus that can be seized on by doubters to allow an otherwise overwhelming body of inexplicable phenomena to be dismissed in its entirety. Sometimes the Fixer effect seems apparent in the subsequent conduct of those involved in paranormal cases, investigators as well as subjects.

After reading *The Poltergeist Prince of London*, I moved on to *The Scole Report* for an equally well attested but very different account of encounters with the spirit world, this time via mediumship in a much more scientific framework. Although the very civil and sometimes eminent entities encountered at Scole were of a different class in every sense to the likes of Donald, there were parallels with the ultimate elusiveness of fine detail, especially for those who were not present. The Cosmic Fixer seems to have swept this most scientific of attempts to prove the afterlife under the proverbial carpet for the masses too. After reading about Scole, I took to Google to find out what had become of Robin Foy, one of the principal mediums in the experiment. One of the first links I saw was to a crowdfunding appeal where Mr Foy was seeking public donations to raise £500,000 in order to buy and refurbish a specific property in sunny Spain as an International Centre for Spiritual Scientific Research: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/>



## Walthamstow Madonna

The Walthamstow Headless Madonna [FT404:73] is situated at the entrance to Marias Gardens off Palmerston Road next to the parish church of Saint Michael and All Angels on the corner of Northcote Road – a good half-mile from Walthamstow Central and St Mary Road. It has had its head knocked off quite a few times over the years.

**Andy Charles**

*Walthamstow, London*

I would love this to be a wayside shrine, but the young lady is exposing her right leg from the thigh to the ankle – and I don’t think I have ever seen a statue where the Madonna is doing that.

- On the subject of religion: I was so pleased to see the letter from Jarett Kobek, “Pagan roots denied” [FT404:72]. It becomes increasingly tiresome to read from various sources that Easter is really a Spring Festival, ‘stolen’ from the pagans. For reasons which I supposed would have been obvious, the date of Easter was chosen to coincide – more or less – with Passover. But then, what can you do when someone writes (on the alleged pagan origins of Christmas): “It is no accident that Christmas Day is the day of winter equinox” – except that it isn’t. And even if the writer meant the solstice, that’s not quite true either.

**Tina Rath**

*London*

robin-foy.

I do not intend to disparage this project, or the intention behind it, but it has the swish of the Cosmic Fixer’s sweeping brush about it.

**Mark Graham**

*Huddersfield, West Yorkshire*

## Sirens

William Hohauser’s letter about sirens [FT403:71] reminded me that back in October 2015 they were researching a new Emergency Services siren for the Police, Ambulance and all other services, specifically designed to catch your attention aurally with a

“wow wow wow shish” format and was far removed from what most of us would think as a siren.

Deborah Withington, a researcher from Sound Alert, a company set up by Leeds University to exploit the development, said the new siren was a vast improvement on the four different types currently used by emergency services in Britain. Acoustic scientists who made tests on 200 volunteer drivers said the new sound alerted the public to an emergency vehicle and allowed other road users and pedestrians to assess instantly the direction from which it was travelling.

“We tried to create a sound so

that, the very first time you hear it, it’s enough to recognise where it’s coming from”, Dr Withington said. ([www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/new-siren-call-road-emergency-vehicles-1601094.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/new-siren-call-road-emergency-vehicles-1601094.html), 6 Oct 2015).

Despite what the article says, it seems as if it was never deployed/pursued, or set up. I have never heard it when an Emergency Service vehicle has gone past with lights and siren going. We live on a main road and it’s not uncommon to hear Emergency Vehicle sirens 10 times a day, and they all seem to be what you’d think of as the American “woo, woowoooooo, woo, woo” ones.

**James Watson**

*By email*

Like Alan Cassady-Bishop [FT403:71], I too was brought up near Plumstead Common in the 1970s, an area which for a child had a sense of the uncanny, with strange weather – it could be foggy up near the Common but bright sunshine down in Woolwich (or vice versa) – and local legends of alien big cats as well as Iron Age warriors and princesses in burial mounds. There seemed to be too many hospitals and cemeteries in walking distance, all of which were haunted of course, as were the remains of an abbey and location where highwaymen were gibbeted.

I lived in a house where you could hear something walking up the stairs at night and opening doors. It was just round the corner from a guarded barbed-wire-enclosed MOD establishment and COOP farm from which livestock would escape. I was brought up on *Doctor Who*, *Pipkins*, *King of the Castle*, *Children of the Stones* and *Sapphire & Steel*, so the Sunday siren was the icing on the cake of the decade’s weirdness.

I could never understand though why they bothered to test the siren on Plumstead Common; we were safe from the Thames flooding, our house being two miles from, and 150ft (46m) higher than, the river.

**Darren Adams**

*London*

*(Letters continued on page 76)*



# It Happened to Me...

## Cat-person

On New Year's Day 1979 I had supper with Maria Moustaka in her flat in Finborough Road, Fulham. [Editor's note: Neil Oram had driven south from his home beside Loch Ness the day before. Maria was playing the female lead in his epic play cycle *The Warp*, directed by Ken Campbell, which was opening at the ICA the following day.] Afterwards, Maria and I were sitting together on her sofa listening to music and looking out through her French windows into her garden. All of a sudden her cat went ballistic. It didn't scream but *howled* like a wolf... and ran full pelt out of the room... up the passage... into the bedroom... back down the passage... back up the passage – *howling!* Maria tried to catch it but it just clawed her and ran away, *howling* like it was being murdered.

Maria exclaimed that she'd never seen her cat behave like this. Then she shrieked and gripped my hand as a huge cat-person alighted on the wall at the end of the garden. Not a big cat, but a cat-person crouching – facing us from the top of the six-foot [1.8m] high wall. Not exactly a human face. Not exactly a cat's face. Somehow I knew what it was. I felt spaced out but not afraid. It seemed to emanate a powerful, quiet ambience as it almost floated down into the garden. Maria was shaking and digging her nails into my palm. The cat-person, roughly five feet [1.5m] tall, started to walk, upright, toward us. Almost glide-walked towards us. And as this elemental utter strangeness approached the large French window, I could sense an invisible steady intense air pressure building up on the creature's side of the window.

I thought the glass had cracked – but it was Maria's cat howling even more distraughtly. The absolute black furry streak of complete



*“She shrieked as a large cat-person alighted on the wall at the end of the garden”*

cosmic strangeness raised its palms (not paws) – raised its palms so we could see them pressed against the glass. (I think Maria passed out at this point, but only for a few seconds, because I pulled her awake and hissed – “Just watch”). It seemed to me that this jet-black visitor was not familiar with windows. It kept its hands on the glass for 20 seconds – the demented cat still howling – then turned around and glided/walked back to the wall... and seemed to almost float back up to a crouching position on top of the wall. It turned around and looked in our direction, then seemed to be scanning all the way around... turned its

back to us... and disappeared beyond the wall. The sound of weird silence invaded the flat. The trembling cat, now silent, settled on Maria's lap.

“Did it have a tail, Neil?” Maria asked me recently, 40 years later in her different garden in north London where she now lives with two demanding female cats. It was a very bright, warm sunny day in late September. “True, you would think a tail or a lack of tail would not be forgotten,” I said; “but actually Maria, actually I don't think it's something we've forgotten – but a feature we failed to digest at the time.” Maria nodded and took another drag on her fag.

Neil Oram  
Inverness

## Rabbit man

I grew up in the small Lincolnshire hamlet of Branston Booths, named in legislation as a “nitrate sensitive area”. It had a pub, an old wooden village hall and a

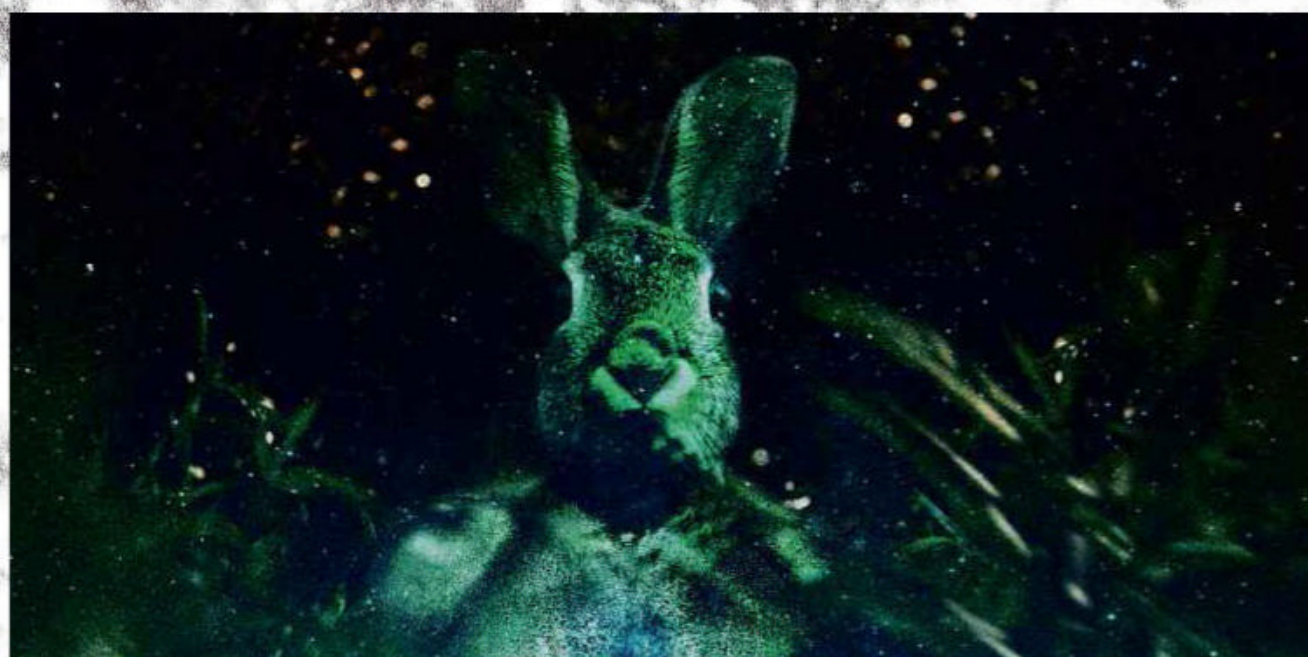
chapel, but no church or shop. What it lacked in amenities, however, it more than made up for in attractions for adventurous children, such as a mysterious island surrounded by a moat, a stretch of woodland with some old but occasionally inhabited caravans in the midst of it (always the operations centre for international crimes in our imagination), and a body of reedy water known locally as the ‘Delph’. This waterway ran straight from the main crossroads at the Booths, via an intersection with the Car Dyke, to the Sincil Drain, ultimately feeding the county's main watercourse, the River Witham.

The Delph has high grassy banks on either side, accessed from the crossroads by the Car Dyke's own bank, which runs crossways to meet them and provides a bridge between the Car Dyke and the Delph. The first Delph bank is about 10m (33ft) away from the crossroads access point.

One summer's evening in 1985, as day was slowly turning to night, I was with my band of adventurers at the crossroads – there were five of us, aged 12 to 14 – chatting idly, with the Delph and bank tops, and fields beyond, as our backdrop. Three had their backs to the Delph, I was facing it, and a friend, Darrell, was standing to my right on a slight diagonal so that he was able to turn to me and then to our friends during the conversation, giving him a broader view than the rest of us. We were on the point of saying our goodbyes when something caught my eye. A head had popped up over the first Delph bank-top, and as I turned to register it, my mind was troubled: was this a rabbit-faced man or a man-faced rabbit? And with that, the head, on a pair of non-rabbit-sized shoulders, shot back down behind the bank.

Open-mouthed, I looked to Darrell, who had a similar expression, and we both said in excited unison, “Did you





see that?" We tried desperately to explain what we had seen to our friends – Darrell found it difficult to articulate, perhaps because of the angle at which he saw it, other than describing this human/animal 'thing' popping up and shooting back down again. We searched along the banks to see if it was still there. We found nothing, but – if truth be told – we didn't look very hard. It was a terrifying encounter, but mercifully short. My friends were non-plussed – "You just saw a big hare or rabbit" – but Darrell had seen what I had seen, and he just shook his head.

Over the years, I have sought to explain this away as a trick of the crepuscular light (but why would it trick two people in the same way?), as a larger than normal animal (but I have seen enough rabbits and hares to know that they do not pop up in that way, or have human-like shoulders), or as a person playing a prank (doubtful, given that it is one of those places where everybody knows everybody else, and we would definitely have heard about it later). Was the entity, perhaps, a cousin of the "giant rabbits" of the mythical island of Hy-Brasil? I have also wondered about whether I had already seen *The Wicker Man* and was simply imagining a man with an animal head mask popping into the shot, as they do most memorably in the film; but had Darrell seen that film too and had he really been having the same thoughts as me?

None of these strike me as satisfactory explanations – I definitely saw something

strange that night and it has stayed with me ever since. We didn't mention it again within our group, and while I have always looked at those banks hoping to catch another glimpse, none has been forthcoming. I lost touch with Darrell when I went to university and he moved from Branston Booths, and I hope he sees this account. It is the first time I have written it down and would welcome his and any other reflections on this brief encounter.

**Andrew Mitchell**  
*Bourne, Lincolnshire*

## Comforting vision

Having read about patients' near-death visions of much-loved pets in Alejandro Parra's fascinating article [FT398:40-45], I would like to share a moving story. I prefer to remain anonymous, as my sister may not want to be acknowledged publicly as part of it. The story is exactly as she told it, to the best of my recollection.

On 1971, 18 months after my father's death, we were faced with the unpleasant task of having Honey, his much-loved retriever, put to sleep, because of a terminal kidney condition. In those days, no one in the family owned a car, and no local taxi firms were prepared to transport a large and very sick dog, in case of accidents, so we contacted a vet who was prepared to do a home visit and administer the last rites. Neither my brother, sister or mother wanted to witness the fatal injection, and so it fell to me to sit by Honey and comfort her as

best I could. As it went in to her vein, she stretched out as if she were lying in a warm patch of sunlit lawn, sighed gently, and was gone. After the vet left, we all went to various rooms to grieve for Honey, and also for my dad, as in a way, our last link with him had also been severed.

Suddenly my sister shouted from the lounge, where she had been sitting on the sofa, and my mother, brother, and I rushed down to see what was wrong. She had been crying, and having stopped, stared into space, thinking about our father and Honey, when the wall in front of her seemed to shimmer and then cleared to a view of a rich green meadow, studded with wild flowers. To the left of the meadow, stretching across the horizon, was a range of majestic snow-capped mountains, while to the right was a dark forest of huge pine trees that stretched off into the distance. The scene was lit by brilliant sunshine under a cerulean sky, dotted with fluffy white clouds. A man full of youthful vitality came running out of the forest. As he moved further into view, he turned and, laughing, waved his arm, calling to someone. The figure was my father, fit, healthy and no longer ravaged by cancer. A large golden retriever bounded up to him from out of the trees, and put her front paws on his hip, while he stroked her head and kissed her, as he always had in life. Then he turned and ran, with Honey by his side, as the scene faded.

This story had a marked (and positive) effect on all of us, and I have often found

comfort in it over the past half century. Logic might say that at that moment, my sister was overwrought with grief, with the still raw trauma of our father's illness and relatively recent death, and the loss of a much loved pet, and that what she saw was a mental construct, that gave her – and all of us – some solace; others might prefer to believe that she was granted a privileged glimpse into what is beyond physical death. Personally, I prefer to think that sis had a vision of what is to come.

In her prime, Honey was a big and heavy (84lb/38kg) dog, and when she came down the stairs, they would creak in a particular rhythm, in a way that a two-legged human could not replicate. We never saw her again, but would sometimes hear her coming down the stairs.

**David —**  
*Ealing, London*

## Telekinesis?

I was at a friend's flat-warming a while back and, as is typical for me, the first thing I did was accidentally break the handle of his toilet. I reached inside the cistern to pull the flush, then confessed to him. He took it like a champ. At this party was a recently torn-apart love triangle, where someone had stolen someone's girlfriend and, to the horror of the woman in question, both paramours had turned up, and a lot of nervous glares were exchanged. Then a picture flew off the wall and smashed on the floor. No one had jolted the wall from behind.

I've read how young women are supposedly a magnet for poltergeist activity. I had been looking at the picture at the time, so it might even be the case that something was trying to grab my attention, something that had clocked my observant nature. I am not suggesting that I was trying to bring the picture down myself. The party was a bit of a fizzle, we're a boring crowd when you get right down to it, and for the next week apology emails flew around, mentioning "all the tension in the air".

**James Wright**  
*Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex*



# LETTERS

## White gloves

Regarding the mythconception about wearing white gloves to handle old books [FT401:23]: I've worked as a librarian for 20 years and the only times I've ever worn white gloves at work to handle books is when I've had to work in a dusty store full of low-use stock, or when I've been cleaning the shelves. Admittedly, I don't work with particularly old books – they're 150 years old or younger, their pages made from paper rather than parchment – but when I've used old books in archives, I haven't been asked to wear white gloves. You do, however, have to use book cushions and page weights.

When I've handled parchment documents at The National Archives – the oldest dating from the 16th century – I haven't had to wear white gloves either. However, you're not allowed to follow the text by running your fingertip across the parchment; instead, you have to use a strip of paper. Parchment is animal skin, and it doesn't absorb ink as paper does. The dried ink sits on the surface, and if you were to run your finger across it, you'd carry the ink away with it. I've heard that one reason you don't wear gloves when handling parchment is because the animal skin benefits from the oil on your fingers – but I don't know if there's any truth in that.

The one and only time I've handled an old book, with paper pages rather than parchment, while wearing white gloves was when I visited Moyse's Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds. This was the trial report of the Red Barn murderer, William Corder, bound in his own skin [see FT233:45].

**Helen Barrell**  
Birmingham

## Cold comfort

In Ghostwatch [FT403:20] I was struck by the nominative resonance between Iceland's acclaimed physical medium Indridi Indridason (1883-1912), and the mysterious informant Indrid Cold in John Keel's semi-

nal fortean text *The Mothman Prophecies*. A quick online search showed I am not the first to make this association. Christopher Josiffe speculated likewise on Twitter in 2019. Was Indridason the inspiration (unconscious or otherwise) for the Cold 'character'? Others suggest the medium himself lives on, and somehow tried to intervene in the events leading up to the Point Pleasant Bridge collapse; or perhaps he was an alien the whole time, his ET technology accounting for his miraculous powers.

Top results on the first page also include the statement "I will not make decisions based on messages from Indrid Cold" translated into both Hebrew and Czech. At that point my browser, Firefox, crashed. With its flames clearly extinguished by the Cold, I was able to haul myself out of this icy sinkhole before it consumed any more of my afternoon.

- The US state dept has recently 'archived' a wide range of material on its website, possibly due to nothing more sinister than the change of administration, and the link to the extraordinary Wuhan Fact Sheet [FT403:7] has died. However, it is still available in the archive and can be found here: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html>

**Ryan Shirlow**  
Leeds, West Yorkshire

## Ted Hughes tulpa?

Toni Arthur's spectral figure near the Rollright Stones [FT403:39], which reminded her of Ted Hughes, reminded me of a case reported by [cornwalllive.com](http://cornwalllive.com) last September. Apparently, about 20 years ago, a man working in a clearing at St Mawgan, near Newquay, saw a copper-coloured Bigfoot-like entity. His colleagues told him, "Oh yeah, we call them woodwoses. Just leave them be". Wodwo (same word, different spelling) is the title poem of Ted Hughes's poetry collection of 1967. 'Ghost Crabs', from the same book, contains the lines: "They are the powers of this world. We are

their bacteria". (Compare Fort's "We are property"). Hughes lived in the West Country in his later years and died in 1998. Was what the man saw a Ted Hughes thought-form?

**Richard George**  
St Albans, Hertfordshire

## The name's Bond

The news report entitled "The name's Bond" [FT402:27] reminded me of something I came across while researching a book, *The Jurassic Coast*. A notable family in the area of the abandoned village of Tyneham on the Dorset coast were called Bond. In the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*, Pierce Brosnan (playing Bond) mutters the phrase used as the film's title, explaining that this was his family's motto. The real Bond family, whose family seat is at Holme Priory in Dorset, does indeed have this very motto. Ian Fleming – who went to Durnford School near Langton Matravers for a few years from the age of seven – mentions this in his 1963 book *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. He would no doubt have heard about the locally prominent Bond family and learned of the motto.

In an article in the *Daily Telegraph* (30 Oct 2008), Nick Britten revealed how the current owner of Holme Priory, William Bond, has a diary from his ancestor Denis Bond that tells of an earlier John Bond who was a spy for Sir Francis Drake. Apparently it was John Bond who adopted the motto "The world is not enough" from King Philip of Spain, who had originally used it. Perhaps one of the many sources of inspiration behind the famous fictional spy?

Incidentally, Bond Street in London was named after a member of this same family, the 17th century landowner Sir Thomas Bond.

**Paul Harris**  
Folkestone, Kent

## Extremely ancient

A while ago I came across this interesting story in *The China Mail* (18 June 1947):

### "Canton Loses Its Tortoise"

The 'City of Rams' has lost its 1,000-year-old giant tortoise, which died yesterday, according to Chinese press dispatches from Canton. The tortoise, originally from the Paracel Islands, was one of the main attractions in Canton's Han Min Public Park. With its passing away, the City Government's daily budget has been reduced by CNC \$4,000, the amount which had to be paid out daily for the tortoise's meals."

Nowadays there are no giant tortoises in the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, though in Beijing there are large statues of tortoises dating from the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368-1644) that look somewhat like the ones found in the Galapagos Islands. However, according to the Vietnamese author Le Qui Don (1726-1784) in his work *Phu Bien Tap Luc* ('Miscellaneous Records on the Pacification of the Frontiers'), there were giant tortoises in the Paracel Islands in those days. More about these and other tortoise and turtle anomalies can be found in *Bio Fortean Notes* vol.3 (Coachwhip Publications, 2013). A quick online search found that the oldest modern-day tortoise died in Oyo state, Nigeria, in 2019, aged 344.

**Richard Muirhead**  
By email



CLIVE GODDARD



# PECULIAR POSTCARDS



**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past celebrates the chain-smoking Sudanese giant whose career took him from Cairo to Cardiff

## 16. HASSAN ALI, THE EGYPTIAN GIANT

If we are to believe the book *Fahrend Volk* by the German circus historian HW Otto, the giant Hassan Ali was discovered at the Siwah-Amoms oasis in Egypt by animal trader Heinrich Möller. In 1894, at the age of just 16, he was exhibited in Munich and Cologne, before being taken to Castan's Panoptikum in Berlin, where he was admired by the celebrated anthropologist Professor Rudolf Virchow. He was said to be 7ft 9in (236cm) tall, and still growing rapidly, with coarse features, a cone-shaped head, and very long arms and legs.

In December 1894, when Hassan Ali was exhibited at Waverley Market, Edinburgh, he was (wrongly) stated to be the tallest man in the world, measuring more than 7ft 10in (239cm) in height. He was taken to the London Pavilion, where he was billed as 'The Soudanese Giant'. Before being discovered in Egypt, he had worked as a whip-maker in Cairo. According to the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, his father had been a soldier and over 8ft (244cm) tall; he had ended his days fighting for the Mahdi against the British Army in the Sudanese campaign. Hassan Ali was very popular during his long stint in London. According to *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, "A new Egyptian giant, Hassan Ali, stated to be only 17 years old despite his 99 inches (251cm) of height, is now the big attraction at the Pavilion. Hassan Ali, who is a very pleasant faced monster, should revive the taste for giants, which has been somewhat on the wane of late." Described as a dark-skinned gentleman of pleasant manners, he spoke no English, meaning that he was unaware of the eulogies pronounced upon him by his manager Mr

Swanborough. From the stage, the giant could easily shake hands with the occupants of the boxes in the grand circle.

He remained in London until May 1894 and then visited the Empire Palace in Portsmouth and Stoll's Panopticon in Cardiff, where he shared the stage with the former executioner James Berry. After two weeks at Welsh provincial theatres, he crossed the Atlantic, since he was under contract with Barnum & Bailey's circus show, currently touring the United States. He appeared on stage with a Garman dwarf known as Fritz Christian. In January 1899, the show came to tour Britain, beginning at the Olympia in London. When Hassan Ali was featured in the *Westminster Budget*, it was noted that he had recently married a 14-year-old girl who shared his Muslim faith; she was 6ft (183cm), but never appeared at the show, since the strict giant had declared that no infidel might look upon her fair face. Even after more than four full years in Britain and the United States, he could still not speak proper English, although he understood quite a few words and said "How-do-you-do" to the journalist. He had been equipped with a special bed, 9ft (274cm) and 5ft (192cm) wide. For breakfast he had four cups of very sweet tea with milk, half a loaf of bread and some butter. Dinner was two pounds of beef or mutton, well cooked and without fat. Tea was the same as breakfast. He smoked as many as 60 or 70 cigarettes in a normal day. "Smoke very, very good!" he exclaimed to the journalist. A short young Nubian lad, Osman by name, acted as the servant and attendant of the



chain-smoking giant.

Barnum & Bailey's collection of wonders remained at the Olympia for several months. A Wrexham journalist left the following description: "A huge Egyptian giant, Hassan Ali, sat there quite grave, dignified and quiet: his huge hand engulfed mine as he grasped it. He is 7ft 11in (241cm) in height, and looks mild and amiable as most giants do, and much stronger and better proportioned than most giants I have seen."

In April 1899, the show moved to Bristol, and then on to Cardiff, Sheffield, Liverpool and Llandudno. In July 1899, they were in Southampton, before travelling to York, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The circus then went back to the United States, where further performances were planned. In February 1900, Hassan Ali was exhibited at Austin & Stone's museum in Boston, and he then toured the country with Adam Forepaugh and the Sells Brothers' show. But by late 1900, he was feeling homesick. He

**LEFT:** A postcard of Hassan Ali posted in Margate in 1903, with a 'funny' inscription on the front.

had earned large sums of money during his tours, and decided to take four months holiday back home in Cairo. In late November 1900, he is recorded to have arrived in Liverpool on board the steamer *Etruria*. He told a journalist about his plans for a holiday, before adding that his father and grandfather, two very tall men, were still living. Hassan Ali now had a child with his wife, he said, and the youngster was already very tall at the age of four. The giant had suffered much hardship on board the *Etruria*, as everything was too small for him, but the kind ship's carpenter had made him an extra-long bed.

After his holiday in Cairo, Hassan Ali travelled through Europe by land, exhibiting himself on the way. In April 1902, he arrived in Paris, having travelled from Marseille. The giant made it all the way back to the United States, where he joined the Ringling Brothers' circus and toured the country once more. In May 1904, he visited the Boston Circuit Court to declare his intention to become a naturalised US citizen. He had learnt to read and write, and signed the application in his own hand; he had belatedly also been able to learn some English, and gave his occupation as 'giant'.

Hassan Ali gradually sank back into obscurity, being ousted from his fame by Feodor Machnow and other giants, and relegated to touring small-time American towns with second-rate circuses and sideshows. The last sighting of him was in El Paso in March 1914.



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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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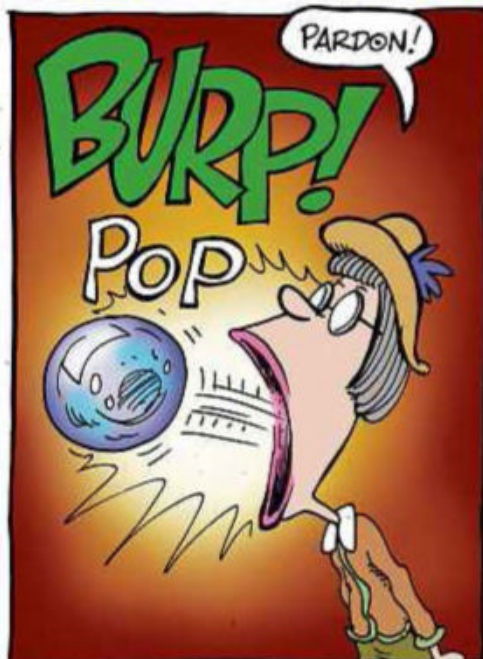
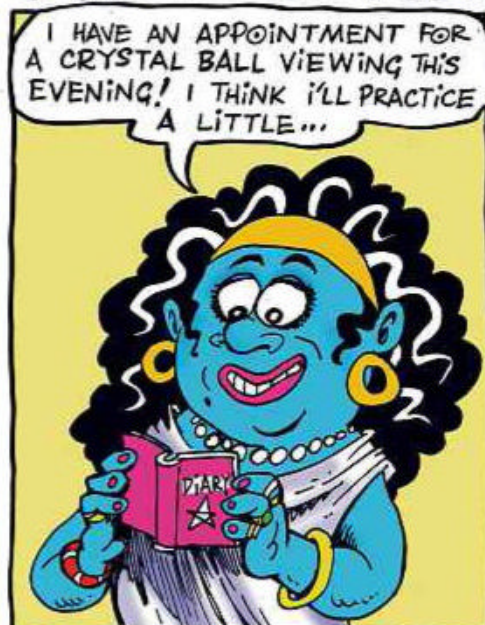
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# PHENOMENOMIX

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# FORTEAN TIMES 407

ON SALE 17 JUNE 2021

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Lake County Sheriff's officers were called to a home in central Florida's DeLand after a man reported having been attacked by his grandfather. Kolby Parker, 30, told deputies that he and his grandfather, Ronald Wells, Sr., had been smoking marijuana when a confrontation occurred. Parker claims he acted in self-defence when the older man attacked him with a knife, telling the officers that he managed to take possession of the weapon and himself use it on Mr Wells, who was found dead on the front porch with multiple stab wounds.

While being questioned by police, Parker allegedly pulled two human ears – later established to be those of his grandfather – from a trouser pocket. Deputies described how Parker had become violent towards them, but was eventually subdued before being taken into custody. Despite his claims of self-defence, he admitted to having hit his grandfather multiple times in the head with a baseball bat and stabbing him repeatedly with a butcher's knife. He also confessed to cutting his grandfather's ears off, stating that he wanted his grandfather to be with his dead grandmother. *miami.cbslocal.com, 17 Mar 2021.*

A tourist died and a child was seriously injured after a huge lump of ice fell from the frozen Vilyuchinsky waterfall on the volcanic peninsula of Kamchatka in the Russian Far East on 7 January. The falling ice stranded seven visitors and one guide. Two adults in the group sustained light injuries and were taken to hospital. *D.Telegraph, 8 Jan 2021.*

Susan Woods, 45, was walking home in Maghull, Merseyside, on 15 August 2020 with a bag containing a bottle of wine and some cider, which she had bought in an off-licence. At 8.50pm she fell heavily near her home in Moorland Road. The wine bottle broke, a shard of glass slashed her neck and she died of blood loss. *Ormskirk Advertiser, 10 Sept 2020.*

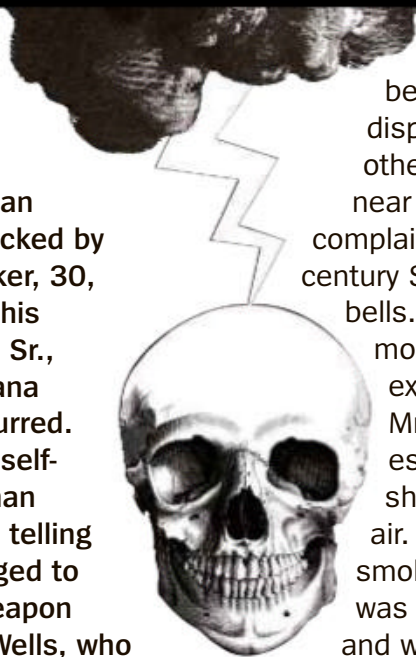
A former police chief who retired to a quiet Suffolk village died in a fireball after setting his car alight beside the village green. Edwin Williams, who was in his 70s and a former Metropolitan Police detective superintendent, had

been involved in a series of disputes with neighbours and other villagers in Cavendish, near Sudbury. He had repeatedly complained about the noise of 14th century St Mary the Virgin's church bells. At 7.30am one Saturday morning, villagers heard a huge explosion and looked out to see Mr Williams's grey Hyundai IX35 estate car on fire, with flames shooting up to 30ft (9m) in the air. The blaze sent a pall of black smoke rising above the village. "He was always falling out with people and was not a very popular man," said one villager. "He had various

legal disputes with different neighbours over the years. He would complain about things like problems with drains and guttering. But his biggest issue was with the church bells. Most people in the village love the sound of the bells, but he would repeatedly moan about them."

Mr Williams wrote an open letter in October 2017, saying he had been "reduced to a frazzle" by the noise of the bells ringing for three hours to commemorate a local soldier who died in World War I. "Living near the church, I do not expect freedom from bells ringing," he wrote. "However, when a three-hour session blights my comfort and amenity, I intend to complain loudly and in the strongest possible terms... In my opinion, this is just an excuse for additional bell ringing practice and amounts to selfish and inconsiderate conduct." The unnamed neighbour recalled Mr Williams had tried to start a petition against the bells "and would go and hammer on the doors of the church warden and the vicar to complain about them." *D.Mirror, 7 Mar 2021.*

The body of Silas Octavis Strimple, 18, was found on the conveyor belt of a Texas recycling centre. The teenager's home address is in Washington state, some 2,000 miles away from the Austin recycling plant. Travis County Sheriff's Office said there were no signs of foul play on the body, but "due to the nature of where the body was discovered, the death is considered suspicious." Strimple is the third person to have been found dead at a recycling facility in the Austin vicinity during the last year. A 62-year-old man was found dead in December 2020, and the body of a 31-year-old man was discovered last March. *kiro7.com, 26 Mar 2021.*





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